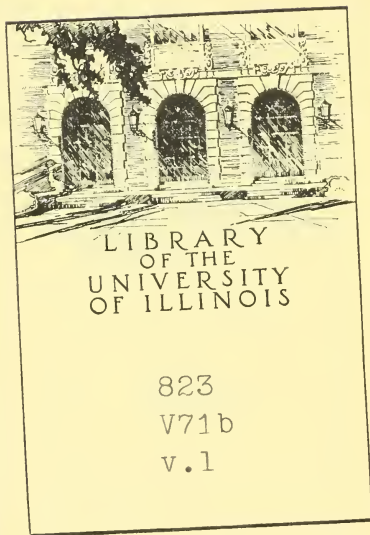


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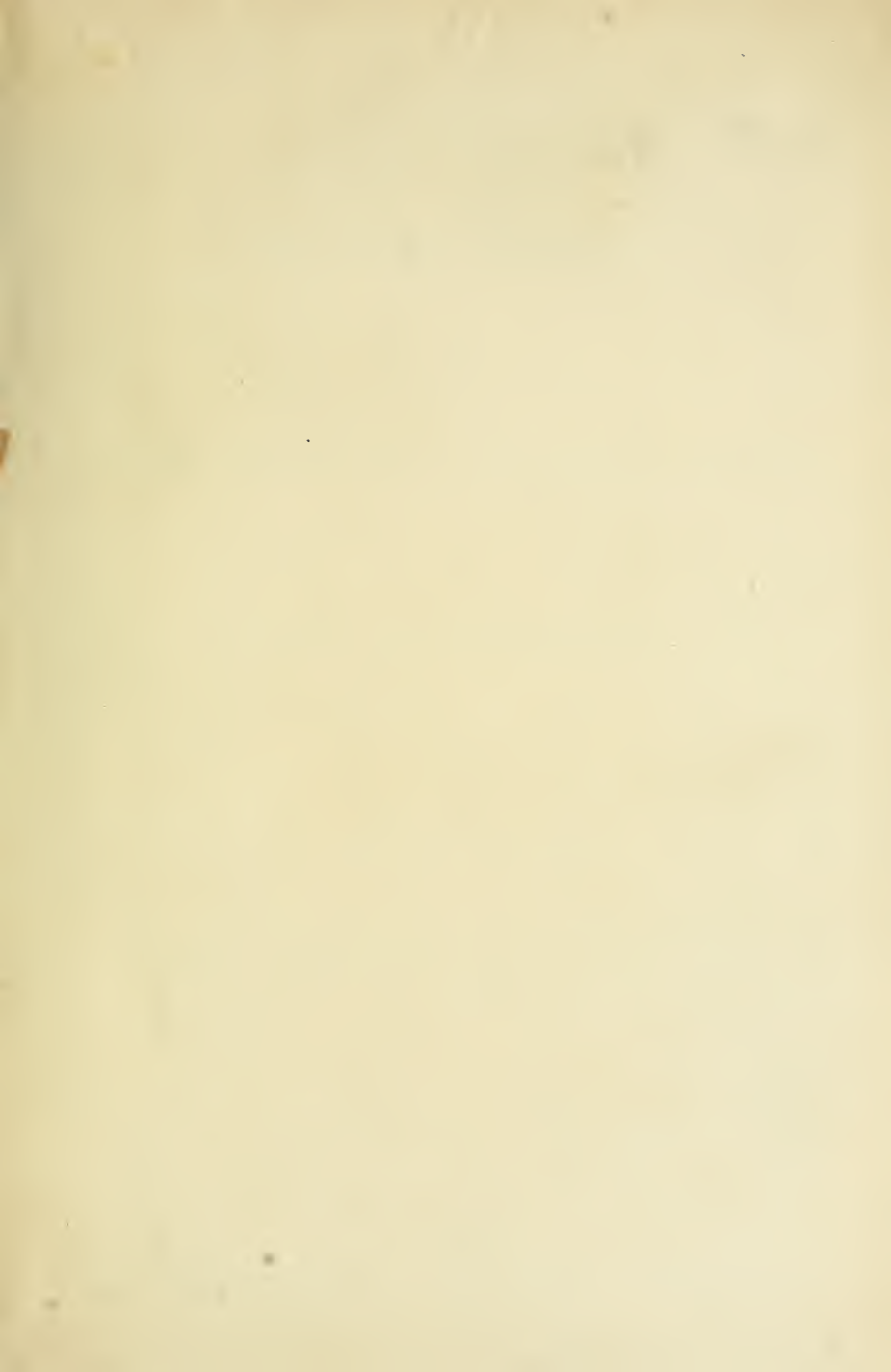
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BLACK BESS;

OR,

THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.

A Tale of the Good Old Times.

"SOME OF THE AUTHOR'S FRIENDS CRY'D—'LOOK'E, GENTLEMEN, THE MAN IS A
VILLAIN; BUT IT IS NATURE, FOR ALL THAT.' AND ALL THE YOUNG CRITICS OF THE
AGE, THE CLERKS, APPRENTICES, &C., CALLED IT LOW, AND FELL A GROANING."

Henry Fielding. ("Tom Jones," Bk. VII. Chap. 1.)

LONDON:

J. HARRISON, SALISBURY COURT, FLEET STREET, AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Author of "BLACK BESS; OR, THE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD," has one request to make.

It is, that these who have, unread, condemned the present work, will take the trouble to peruse it. An entire change of opinion will be the result; because in no place will vice be found commended and virtue sneered at; nor will any pandering to sensuality, suggestions of impure thoughts, or direct encouragement to crime be discovered; neither are there details of seduction, bigamy, adultery, and domestic poisonings, such as are indispensable ingredients of our popular three-volume novels. On the contrary, the work will be found full of exciting personal adventures, such as can never be re-enacted until Railways are swept away, and Stage Coaches replaced on our High-roads—until, in fine, the present state of things is changed to what it was a century and a half ago. If anyone is weak-minded enough to be carried away by the idea that a highwayman's career as depicted in these pages can be played in reality at the present day, he must be imbecile indeed. Let not the "Life of Robin Hood" fall into the hands of such a one, or, sure as fate, Sherwood Forest would be his destination, with a bow and arrows for his stock-in-trade.

Seriously, however, such a state of mind, so produced, would of course work its cure in a little while, before much harm was done; and the victim, thoroughly cured, would laugh heartily at his past folly.

To the Public which has received the work with such unexampled favour the Author begs to express his best acknowledgments, coupled with the hope that his next effort will not be found unworthy of their support.

London.

BLACK BESS;

OR, THE

KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.

A ROMANCE.



[DICK TURPIN STOPS THE LORD MAYOR'S CARRIAGE.]

CHAPTER I.

DICK TURPIN WAYLAYS AND ROBS THE EX-LORD MAYOR OF LONDON ON WIMBLEDON COMMON.

THE rim of the rising moon was just peeping above the horizon, and a few faint, sickly beams of light shot up from it into the night sky, giving to all objects a dim, spectral-like appearance.

Standing in the middle of the high road which skirts Wimbledon Common on the north side was a horse and rider.

The moonlight shimmered upon both with a strange effect.

At first sight it seemed as though a lambent flickering flame was playing over them, from the horse's hoofs to the long feather in the rider's hat.

This was caused by the peculiar tint the vapours on the horizon gave to the moon's rays.

The horseman was leaning forward in his saddle in an attitude of intense listening.

There was something remarkably picturesque and

romantic about him as he sat so still upon his steed in the centre of the deserted highway.

He was tall and muscular, and sat in the saddle with an ease and grace as rare as it was admirable.

His attire was well calculated to set off his figure to the greatest advantage: it was that so much affected by military officers in the reign of the second George.

A three-cornered black felt hat, trimmed with broad gold lace, and with a long black feather trailing from it. A cravat of spotlessly white muslin tied in a large bow, with the ends depending almost to the waist.

A crimson-coloured coat, very long in the waist and very stiff in the skirts trimmed and faced also with gold lace.

A waistcoat of the same materials and colour, coming low down on the hips.

Close-fitting pantaloons of white leather, and large black boots coming up high above the knee.

Such was the costume which he wore.

We have said nothing of the jewellery upon his person, and which glistened faintly in the moonlight. A refined taste would have considered there was a little too much of it.

Of the steed which he bestrode, and which was no other than the mare so celebrated in song and story—Black Bess—we feel it is perfectly unnecessary to say a word in the shape of description.

Her rider—whom we may as well at once call by name, Dick Turpin—had, at the moment we introduce him to our readers, one hand upon her neck.

We have said he was listening intently.

So Bess appeared to be, for her ears were projected forwards.

Upon the soft miry road—for it had been raining heavily a few hours before—was an indistinct grating sound.

None, however, but the most practised listener could have detected it, or, if they had, could have told what it really was.

To Dick the sound was perfectly intelligible.

A carriage was approaching, though as yet it was at a considerable distance.

Very rapidly, however, the sound grew louder and the trampling of horses' hoofs began to mingle with the grating, crushing noise.

Then the light of the carriage lamps flashed through the gloom and cast a dim halo around.

It was one of those capacious, comfortable vehicles, in which our great-grandfathers delighted to ride.

Two powerful horses drew it along at a rapid rate.

There were no armorial bearings upon the carriage, but the gaudy ornamentation about it was sufficient to show that it belonged to no member of the aristocracy.

The stout coachman though, who sat on the box and drove the horses in a dignified sort of way, had something of that appearance.

So also had the footman, who sat with his arms folded before him in the dickey.

The occupants of the carriage were two persons, upon whom the sun of glory had risen, shone, and set.

And all within the space of twelve months.

That period of time had comprehended their butterfly existence.

In a word, they were the ex-lord mayo. and ex-lady mayoress of London.

It was the ninth of November, and he had yielded his title and office to another.

He had not, however, been wholly overlooked, as most are, when their term of office has expired; the civic authorities had somehow taken it into their sapient heads that he had fulfilled his onerous duties with more than common ability, so they had, the previous three months, been busily engaged in getting up a testimonial in the shape of a large gold cup, very elaborately chased and ornamented.

A fulsome inscription, engraved upon it set forth at length the supposititious talents of Lord Mayor Funge.

Such was his eulphonic appellation.

Ezekiel Funge.

Of course, the presentation of this cup increased his pomposity and arrogance in no small degree.

He lolled back in the carriage with a most complacent smile upon his lips.

It had been there ever since he had received the golden

cup. He could not trust it out of his sight, and when he set out for his residence at Mortlake he had put it into the carriage with him.

When we say he could not trust it out of his sight, we speak literally, for the cup was placed on the cushions on the opposite seat, so that as he stretched out his legs and leaned back, he could contemplate its beauties through his half-closed eyelids.

The quantity of fat upon his face prevented his opening them to any great width.

"Matilda!" he said to his wife, for the fifth time during their ride; "are you looking at the cup?"

"Of course not, you idiot," was the polite reply of his better half, who was in appearance the very opposite of himself, for she was thin and waspish, with a vinegar-looking countenance, and a particularly shrill, sour, disagreeable voice. "Of course not, idiot; do you think I'm like you, got eyes for nothing else?"

Ex-Mayor Funge gave a gasp, and agitated his fat hands like the fins of a turtle when he is suddenly thrown on his back.

"My dear, my dear," he said, "how often I have expressed my desire that you would not speak in that dreadful way; it is really—I may say—really—"

"Hold your tongue, do, stupid!" interrupted his wife, "and don't make such an ass of yourself, or if you have got anything to say, say it at once, and not circumvent about as if you were addressing a lot of tipsy aldermen!"

"You don't comprehend, Matilda—you don't comprehend; and you don't sufficiently, duly, and properly appreciate the honour and respect which have been paid me as a reward for the trustworthy fulfilment of the important duties which devolved upon me."

"Oh! stuff!"

"Matilda!"

"Rubbish!"

Ex-Mayor Funge gave a groan.

"It's a great trouble to me," he said; "a little thought when I went courting you at the fishmonger's, in Fore-street, how you would turn out. Ah! me, I wish some of the old folks could have lived to see this beautiful cup!"

He took it into his hands as he spoke, and held it up so that the light of the carriage lamp should fall upon it.

As he held it there, in the uncertain light, it looked very rich and handsome. The design was good, and the execution tasteful.

But its appearance, pretty and captivating as it would have been to ninety-nine women out of a hundred, made no impression on the ex-mayor's wife. She was one of those women who are always grumbling and discontented with everything and everybody.

Still ex-Mayor Funge carried his admiration for the cup to rather a ridiculous extent.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he kept repeating, as he turned it over in his hands, and viewed it on every side. "Beautiful! it's—a—really—a—what's that?"

The ex-lord mayor gave a great start, and let go the cup, which fell with a dab on the floor of the carriage.

It was the sudden report of a pistol which gave him such a shock of alarm.

The explosion was followed by a voice which said, in clear, decisive tones—

"Pull up, coachman, or you are a dead man!"

Like a prudent man who values his skin above all things, the aristocratic-looking coachman at once brought the carriage to a stand-still.

"Oh! Matilda, Matilda!" said the ex-mayor. "It's a highwayman—a highwayman! I shall lose my beautiful cup."

At this moment Dick rode up to the window, and let it down with a crash. Ex-Mayor Funge's agony and alarm at the presumptive loss of his cup were very visibly impressed upon his countenance, which was really an amusing thing to look upon.

Dick laughed outright.

He just projected the barrel of a pistol a little way into the carriage as he said, blandly—

"A nice evening after the rain, your lordship."

"A nice fiddlestick, you vagabond!" said the ex-mayor, imitating Dick's manner. "I suppose you will rob us first, and cut our throats afterwards."

"Oh! not by any means, your ladyship, not by any means. I should never forgive myself were I to deprive

society of two such ornaments to it as yourself and your worthy spouse."

Dick lifted his hat and made a most elaborate bow as he concluded his reply.

As for the ex-mayor himself, he could only give vent to some inarticulate groans.

"I am sorry to trouble you," said Dick, "but this is really a case of necessity. I must trouble you for your money, rings, watch, and the gold cup you have got with you in the carriage."

As these last words reached the ex-mayor's ears, he uttered such a dismal groan that Dick fairly drew back his head out of the carriage.

"Come, come," said Dick, recovering himself, "I am very much pressed for time, so I beg that you will comply with my request with all possible expedition."

"Oh! you wretch! you villain!" said the ex-mayor. "You ill-bred, low brought-up son of a parish. If I was a man wouldn't I settle you pretty quick!"

Her husband sat still on the seat, quite incapable of speech or motion.

With a skill and dexterity that could only have been acquired by long practice, Dick rapidly transferred the contents of the mayor's pockets to his own.

Then he looked about for the cup, but could see it nowhere.

The ladies then, as in the present day, distended their dresses with hoops, so that large as the carriage was, the skirts of the ex-mayor's nearly filled it.

"I very much regret to say," said Dick, opening the carriage door, "that I shall have to trouble you both to alight."

Ezekiel was nearest the door, and with some little difficulty Dick dragged him out.

No sooner did his feet touch the ground than he sat down on the roadside, in a very doleful and undignified manner indeed.

"Now, my lady, I must trouble you, if you please."

"Don't 'my lady' me, you villainous-looking rascal! Don't 'my lady' me, I say. You know as well as I do that it ain't my title any longer, you do, you ugly wretch!"

Dick smiled in the politest manner, and putting his arm into the carriage, seized her hand, and drew her gently yet forcibly out of it.

The thing was done with extreme featness, and the ex-mayor's found herself standing beside her husband before she was thoroughly aware of what had taken place.

She did not, however, imitate his example and sit down in the road.

Dick glanced again into the carriage, and there, on the floor, near the opposite door, he saw some glittering object which he made sure was the golden cup.

It was quite out of his reach, so he sprang off his horse, and rather imprudently got into the carriage.

But the ex-mayor's had an eye to all that was going on, and springing forward, she banged the carriage-door, and fastened it in a moment.

"Joseph! Joseph!" she shrieked; "get down in a minute, and run to the other door. I've caught the plundering villain. Stand by the door, and don't let him get out. I'll scratch his face for him if he tries to get out on this side, and you, Thomas, run and get some assistance."

The ex-mayor's felt the courage of an army in her breast.

Now Joseph the footman, and Thomas the coachman, experienced no such sudden accession of valour.

Of the two, Joseph was the greater coward, though he was certainly the youngest and most active.

He was one of those slim, delicate-looking young men who are so often chosen as footmen.

When Dick fired the pistol and called to the coachman to halt, his heart gave such a leap that he almost fell backwards out of the rumble.

However, he did keep his seat, and, finding he was in no way injured, sat there shaking in every limb and quite unable to move.

He had a most wholesome dread of firearms, and, if the assertion be true that the more despicable and contemptible a man is, the more chary he is of risking his life, then Joseph must assuredly have been the most contemptible of human beings.

When his mistress addressed him in such a valiant way, and with such fierceness of tone, he at once began

to descend from the seat, but not with any particular degree of alacrity.

"Make haste, you cowards!" she shouted, dealing her husband a tremendous blow on the side of the head, which did not in any way tend to clear his faculties, for he sat looking more bewildered and stupid than before.

"Make haste, you cowards! and mind he doesn't get out on the other side, I'll take care he don't this."

In the meantime, Thomas the coachman had descended from his box, and, in obedience to her hasty command, had started off in the somewhat hopeless task of looking for some kind of assistance.

Trembling all over like a jelly, Joseph took up his station at the carriage door in order to prevent the highwayman from making his escape.

All, however, was most suspiciously quiet inside the carriage.

Black Boss had strayed some little distance down the lane, and was cropping some of the short grass which grew on the roadside.

The ex-mayor's stood boldly and defiantly on guard.

Then Joseph, who, seeing all so still, had begun to gather some small amount of courage, felt it disappear in a moment when the window close to him was let down with a clattering sound.

A moment more and he would have taken to his heels; but, before he could do so, the coachman, breathless and exhausted, arrived upon the scene.

"Keep—him—a—min—minute longer," he gasped out, "it's—all—right; nabbed he is, my lady. Here's fifty hofficers a—coming."

A perfect shriek of pleasure burst from the lips of his mistress.

"Oh! the low-minded vagabond; he'll be caught and hung now, sure enough, and serve him right, the black-guard!"

The tramp of many horses' feet came now very plainly to their ears.

"Here—they—are—my lady; here—they—are!" said the coachman, who had not yet recovered his wind; "here—they—come; can't you hear them?"

"Yes, yes! here they are, sure enough. He's caught, and we'll all go and see him hung."

As she spoke, a troop of about ten or twelve mounted police officers swept round the corner of the road at a dashing rate.

CHAPTER II.

DICK OBTAINS POSSESSION OF THE LORD MAYOR'S CUP, AND IS HOTLY PURSUED BY THE OFFICERS.

WHEN Dick sprang into the carriage, he made sure he saw the golden cup lying close down by the door.

He found, however, that his eyes had deceived him; so, without more ado, although he had, in a manner of speaking, been imprisoned in the carriage, he set about looking for the cup in a systematic manner.

He could not find it anywhere, and he began to fear that the vixenish mayor's had managed to take it out with her.

Still, as he felt no apprehension from the amount of resistance they would be able to offer, he did not hurry himself, but very leisurely recommenced his search.

He was exceedingly anxious to obtain possession of the cup, and was resolved to do so for a very particular reason.

About a week before, when in company with a few kindred spirits, he had made rather a heavy bet that he would rob the lord mayor of his cup, and present it to them as a trophy on that or the following evening.

At last, after turning over all the cushions, he, to his inexpressible satisfaction, found it jammed in a corner, underneath the seat.

He possessed himself of it, and then listened to what was going forward.

It was then he let down the window, and so frightened Joseph with the sound.

He heard the intelligence that so many mounted officers were at hand, and for the moment was unable to account for it.

"I have it," he said, and a flush of anger swept across his face; "I have it! Some one who was present when I made the bet has set the grabs on my track."

We may as well say here that he was perfectly right in

his conjecture, and at the moment the coachman saw the officers, they were in search of the highwayman.

However, he had the common before him.

He might, though, have some difficulty in regaining his seat on the back of Black Bess. Still, he was well aware that a peculiar whistle would bring her to his side in a moment.

Another circumstance was in his disfavour. The moon which a short time before had only in a dim fashion lighted up the landscape, was now shining brightly, and was only obscured for a minute or two as some small vapoury clouds swept over her disc.

He paused for a brief moment to arrange some plan of action in his mind, and it was then the troop of officers came in sight.

His resolve was quickly taken.

With an exercise of that surprising agility for which he was so famous, he sprang like an harlequin through the window of the carriage.

He chose the side upon which the mayoress stood for the execution of this feat, because Bess was on that side of the way, and he alighted on the unfortunate Ezekiel with so much suddenness and force, that he fell flat down upon the road at once.

The soft, fat body of the ex-mayor broke the violence of his fall, and without even sustaining so much injury as a bruise, Dick sprang in a moment to his feet, and gave the signal to his mare.

She reached his side with a bound at precisely the same moment of time as the officers reached the carriage.

Dick placed but one hand upon her neck, and then vaulted lightly into the saddle.

He was seated in the twinkling of an eye.

"Surrender! surrender!" said the chief of the officers. "There's five hundred pounds for your apprehension, dead or alive. Surrender, or I fire!"

The only reply Dick made to this invitation was to give Bess the reins, and dash off along the road in the direction of the common.

As soon as the chief of the officers saw the movement, he cried in a loud voice—
"Fire!"

The simultaneous discharge of about a dozen pistol-shots followed his command.

Dick, however, was at rather too great a distance for them to be very effective, and they whistled harmlessly about and around him.

Then Bess put forward that speed which could not fail to leave any other horses far in the rear.

After firing the volley, the police took no notice of ex-Mayor Funge and his wife, but plunged forward as rapidly as their steeds would carry them.

It was exceedingly unfortunate for Dick that the moon was shining with so much clearness, as it enabled his pursuers to keep him steadily in view.

They were one and all exceedingly well mounted, and plied whip and spur most vigorously.

After the lapse of a few moments, Dick turned his head and looked behind him.

He was gaining rapidly on his pursuers, and must eventually, unless some unforeseen accident occurred, distance them completely.

He was quite sure of baffling them if he could but reach a small plantation, or rather wood, which was only a mile or two ahead.

He looked back again, and saw the officers were still farther in the rear, although they were goading their horses to the utmost in their endeavour to overtake him.

When he looked back again the next time, it was just as he was entering the wood.

They were then completely out of sight.

He trotted gently along a narrow glade.

A deep silence was everywhere around him.

He looked about him on all sides, in quest of some place of concealment in case the officers should, on finding he had disappeared, take it into their heads to hunt through the wood.

No such place met his gaze. However, he still pushed steadily onward.

At that time the wood was of a tolerable size, though a few poplars were all that remain now to show where it once stood.

Suddenly Dick paused, for a faint, peculiar sound reached his ears.

It came and ceased so suddenly that, acquainted as he was with slight noises of all kinds, he was unable to determine what it was.

It sounded more like the shutting of a door than anything else.

He hastened forward in the direction from whence the sound had proceeded, walking Bess gently, so that her hoofs should make as little noise as possible.

Her tread was almost noiseless upon the soft springy turf.

The trees now began to get thinner, and, after proceeding some distance farther, he emerged into a small clearing of about a quarter of an acre in extent.

At the side of this enclosure opposite to where he stood, an unusually dense group of tall poplar trees reared their summits to the sky.

In the black shadows which they cast was a rudely-built cottage, or rather hut.

It was only one storey high, but it covered a large piece of ground, and its interior was doubtless divided into several apartments.

Dick listened for a minute or two, and then, not hearing any sound, either in advance or behind, rode boldly forward to the door of the solitary habitation.

"Hilloa there! Hilloa! House! house!" he shouted, striking the door some heavy blows with the handle of his riding-whip.

He paused, and, as the summons was disregarded, repeated it.

He did so because he felt almost sure the place was tenanted, for a few rays of light shone through the chinks in the door.

He was on the point of applying his whip for the third time, when the door was abruptly swung open, and a man appeared upon the threshold.

A huge fire was burning within, and emitting a brilliant light, which brought the figure of this man into bold relief.

To all appearance, take him altogether, he was not exactly the individual to inspire a nervous person with confidence if he met him in a lonely place.

"Well," he said gruffly, as he saw Dick observing him, "what's your business?"

"Yes," said Dick.

This was rather an ambiguous reply, and the man favoured him with a long stare.

However, without paying any further attention to him, Dick dismounted from his mare, and holding her by the bridle, walked towards the door of the hut.

"Here—here—hold hard!" said the man, putting his hand against Dick's breast, and striving to keep him back, "I should like to know where you're a comin' to!"

"Inside, my friend, inside. I'm tired, so is my mare, and I want to rest awhile."

He pushed by him into the interior of the hut as he spoke.

The man appeared so astounded at his coolness that he could hardly make any opposition to him; and, seeing him once fairly in, he, with a growl of dissatisfaction, closed the door.

A clumsy three-legged stool was the only thing there was in the place which would serve for a seat.

This Dick monopolized unceremoniously.

"My worthy friend," he said, as the man came towards the fire, "I am very sorry if I have forced myself inconveniently upon you, but pray understand I will pay you liberally for my shelter and your trouble."

The man gave a grunt by way of response.

Observing this sign of concession, Dick took a guinea out of his pocket, and handed it to the man.

His eyes glistened with cupidity as he received it, and his whole bearing underwent a remarkable alteration. "Your lordship's servant," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Give my mare a feed of corn and a little water—only a little, mind."

"Yes, your honour's worship."

"And if you have got anything good to drink in the place, bring me some."

The man replied by going to a chest at the other end of the room, and producing a bottle and glass.

"Brandy," he said, as he placed it on the table.

Dick poured out a glass.

"This is a queer place, rather," he said, after drinking it off, "a very queer place!"

The man looked at him suspiciously.

"Why, yes, it is," he replied, "but it does for a poor fellow like me who picks up his living in the wood."

"A woodman?"

"That's it. You see there's always a great quantity of dry sticks lying about."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a smile, for his companion did not look much like a man given to such peaceful pursuits.

But then appearances are often deceptive.

The man noticed the smile.

"To be sure I sometimes pick up a stray hare or bird, but not very often, though."

"Drink," said Dick.

The man did not need a second invitation.

All remained profoundly still about the old hut.

"Making so bold," said the man, "I should like to know who you be?"

Dick laughed as he said—

"Well, I don't know that I need fear telling you who I am, for, unless I am mistaken, you are a member of the same honourable profession as myself, only in rather a different line."

"Indeed."

"Yes. I wonder when you saw me that you did not at once suspect who I was."

"How should I?"

"When you saw my mare."

"She is certainly a fine creature!" said the man, looking at her more attentively.

"You're right. She has not a white hair about her."

"Then she is—"

"Black Bess!" said Dick. "Fill up your glass, and drink good luck to her rider."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Himself!"

"And are you really him?" said the man, looking upon Dick with some degree of awe, and a great deal of respect.

"Most certainly."

"Then I'll drink your health with all the pleasure in life!"

"Fill up, then."

"And—if now—"

"Speak on. Don't be afraid!"

"If you wouldn't mind, now granting me a favour, I should take it very kind."

"What is it?"

"Let me—"

"Go on!"

"Shake hands with you."

"To be sure I will," said Dick, giving him a hearty grip.

The woodman uttered a sigh of satisfaction, and then said—

"Well, what lay has brought you down these parts? I have never heard of your being here before."

"Well, you see it was rather a special job."

"Oh!"

"About a weekago you must know I was at the 'Three Tuns,' in Seven Dials."

"Ay, ay."

"Well, while we were talking over business, one of the pals, said—

"'I s'pose you've all heard of the cup that's to be given to old Funge, the mayor?'

"Some had and some hadn't."

"Of course."

"So it turned out, when the story was told, that a subscription was afloat to purchase the lord mayor a large golden cup to be presented to him on his retirement from office."

"Yes."

"We all know old Funge," said one. 'He'll burst with pride if he gets this present!'

"Oh! won't he rather!" added another.

"Now," said I, 'I'll bet anybody fifty pounds that I'll take his cup and bring it here within three nights after he receives it.'

"Done!" said one.

"The bet was booked, and the case then looked rather

difficult; for, of course, we did not know that old Funge would be fool enough to take the cup in the carriage with him."

"Then did he?"

"You shall hear. I kept a sharp look-out, and at last found his delight was so great that he could not suffer the cup to go out of his hands, but made just as much fuss with it as a child does with its rattle. However, to make a long story short, I found he had got it in the carriage, and was on his way home without any escort."

"You got it, then?"

"Oh! yes, with hardly any trouble. But just as I had secured it, a party of officers galloped up; but I managed to baffle them, and here I am, safe and sound."

"Then, you've got the cup?" said the man, manifesting a much greater degree of interest in the recital than he had previously displayed. "Have you got the cup with you?"

"Of course I have. Look! here it is."

"Dick, as he spoke, produced the valuable from one of the pockets of his capacious coat.

An eager covetous glance darted from the woodman's eyes as he saw it, and he made a step forward towards Dick.

"It is pretty, is it not?" said the latter, turning it about in his hands. "By this firelight it looks rich indeed."

"Very, very."

Then Dick, for the first time, noticed the avaricious look on the woodman's countenance.

He was on his guard immediately. His suspicions were aroused and he lost not a moment in restoring the precious cup to his pocket.

The woodman watched it disappear from his sight with about the same degree of satisfaction as a famished wolf would exhibit on seeing a lamb, upon which he had set his heart, safely escorted from his fangs.

Dick poured out another glass of brandy.

"Drink!" he said.

The man suddenly assumed a listening attitude.

"What is it?" asked the highwayman. "I hear nothing, and I am accustomed to catch the slightest sound."

"I may be mistaken," said the man, "but I fancy I have heard the tramp of horses' feet. I have lived a many years in the silence of this wood, and my hearing has got sharpened."

"It would."

"Still, I will go to the door and listen. Maybeit was nothing."

The woodman rose from his seat, and, opening the door, stood for a moment listening, and then went out.

"I don't half like his ways," thought Dick. "I will keep a sharp look-out upon him."

He also left the fireside, and walked to the door of the hut.

As he reached it he saw the man returning slowly across the clearing.

"My ears must have deceived me," he said, as soon as he had perceived Dick. "I can hear no one."

"I thought you were mistaken."

There was a slight alteration in the tone of his voice which the man appeared to notice, for he added in an apologetic sort of way—

"At all events, it was a mistake on the right side. I should not like you to get into trouble under my roof."

"No, no!"

"And, for my part, I am very glad to think I did make a mistake."

"Then you think there is no one about?"

"The wood is as quiet as the grave."

"Well, if that is the case, as I have been knocking about a great deal the last night or two, I should be glad of half an hour's slumber."

This was simply a ruse on Dick's part, for he wished to assure himself of the good faith of the woodman, and determined, should it prove he was attempting to play him false, to deal out retribution, with no sparing hand; for, generous and free himself by nature, he detested avariciousness in others.

On the other hand, should the man be really inclined to serve him, it would be a very convenient thing to have such a place as this lonely wood hut to seek a shelter in in case the hue and cry after him should be unusually strong.

It was to this end, then, he proposed to feign sleep as to test him.

The experiment, certainly, was rather a dangerous one, but Dick was a fearless man, and the thought of personal peril never had the least weight against any enterprise he had determined upon.

He interrupted the apologies the woodman began to make by saying—

"As you must know I am accustomed to get sleep how and where I can, and sometimes it is in very strange places, so if I put this stool up in yonder corner, and lean back against the wall, I shall sleep as comfortably as I could wish."

Without, then, waiting for any reply, he placed the stool as he had said, and, folding his arms, leaned back as if to compose himself to slumber.

"Do not let me remain more than an hour," he said, "as I wish to get back to London before dawn."

The man promised to rouse him, and, having done so, stretched himself out at full length in front of the fire.

CHAPTER III.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS SOME OF THE MYSTERIES CONNECTED WITH THE OLD HUT IN THE WOOD.

A deep silence now ensued. Dick with his head leaning on his breast, and his eyes to all appearance close shut, sat perfectly still, allowing nothing that was going on to escape him.

By Dick's orders Bess had been littered down at the further end of the huge apartment.

The wood logs on the hearth sputtered and crackled, and that was the only sound that could be heard.

At last, after the lapse of about a quarter of an hour, and just as the deep repose was drawing the highwayman into a doze, the man by the fire made a slight movement.

Dick was aroused immediately; but was careful not to start in the least degree, so as to make the man suspect he was not actually asleep.

The woodman had placed his hand upon the floor, and risen to a half-sitting posture.

He regarded Dick narrowly, and the latter, as he glanced at his face through his partially closed eyelids, was struck in a moment by the sinister expression which appeared upon it.

He remained for some time without changing his position.

Then he spoke in a strange hoarse whisper.

"He sleeps now," he said; "surely he sleeps, and then what I have to do will be done easily. Ha!"

He sank, suddenly, flat down upon the floor.

Dick had moved a little on his seat.

Then seeing that all remained perfectly still as before, the woodman slowly and carefully raised himself from the ground.

"Yes, yes," he said, in the same whispering tones, and as if he was endeavouring to inspire his craven heart with courage. "Yes, yes! he sleeps soundly—soundly; I must do it all alone, for there is no one down below, but—but—"

"Down below," thought Dick, struck with the strangeness of the remark. "What in the world can he mean?"

"Yes," continued the woodman, "I am here alone with him. He is asleep, and is it not best I should be alone? Surely I can vanquish a slumbering man? Then I will get rid of his body, and the cup will be mine, for if I do the deed by myself, I shall not have to share the worth of it with anyone. No one need know he has been here. I can turn the mare loose in the woods, where she will soon be picked up by someone, or why should I not keep and sell her? That will be an additional profit. I will do it."

"You precious rascal," said Dick to himself. "I would pounce upon you at once, only I should prefer catching you in the very act, and then you could frame no excuse. You little imagine what there is in store for you!"

Slowly, now, and carefully, so as not to make the least noise, the man got up off the floor of the hut.

From his belt he took a long and most formidable looking knife, and clutching it tightly in his hand, he stepped forward cautiously towards him, as he believed, unconscious guest.

Dick remained perfectly still. Not by the slightest

sign did he give the man cause to think he was not sleeping.

But he was on the alert for whatever might happen next.

And now the woodman stood as close as he dared to Dick, and lifted his knife in the air.

Instead, however, of its plunging into the highwayman's heart, as he fully intended it should, he felt his wrist seized, as his arm descended, with a powerful grasp, while another as powerful clutched him by the throat.

"You cowardly, avaricious wretch," said Dick, sternly. "What reason can you give that I should not now at once put an end to your miserable life?"

It would be quite folly to attempt to describe the look of unutterable consternation which overspread the woodman's face at this unexpected termination to the adventure.

"Spare me! spare me!" he cried.

"Spare you, you miserable bound! How dare you make such a request to me? Drop your knife!"

But the woodman, who by this time had recovered from the first shock of his surprise, on finding that Dick was awake, feeling that his condition was so desperate that it could not be made much worse, commenced a violent struggle.

At heart, although he was a big, burly ruffian, he was a thorough-going coward, and like the wolf—which animal he in more than one respect resembled—would not show fight until forced at bay.

With Dick, however, whose muscles seemed of iron, he stood but a poor chance; and, after a fierce but brief struggle, the highwayman threw him with so much violence upon the hard earth, which formed the floor of the hut, that he lay stunned and incapable of motion.

Dick wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"Whew!" he said; "that was hot work, but it strikes me I have settled him for a little while."

However, to put him out of reach of doing further damage, Dick, after a brief search in the hut, found a stout rope with which he securely bound him.

Then he lifted him up, and fairly threw him into one corner of the apartment.

It was not the gentlest of treatment, but then as Dick very justly said, he did not see how he could expect him to be particularly careful how he used him.

He gave no signs of life or consciousness.

Dick went to the door of the hut, and, opening it, took a long look around and about him.

Nothing, however, but the tall trees met his gaze.

The moon was now high in the heavens, and all objects were distinctly visible.

He listened, but all was still.

Then he turned back, and was about to lead Bess out of the hut and mount her and ride off, when he suddenly recollected the remark the woodman had made about no one being down below, and he immediately became curious to know the meaning of what he said.

"Yes," he said to himself, after deliberating the subject in his mind for a few moments; "yes, there is certainly something more in this hut than meets the first glance; and as I have yet some hours to spare, I will try if I cannot find out what it is."

Having come to this determination, he set about in a very business-like manner, making an examination of the building.

For this purpose he took one of the burning brands from the fire, and which would serve very well as a torch, to assist him in his investigations.

He commenced with the apartment in which he had been sitting. From the size and rambling manner in which the hut was built, he felt sure there must be several others.

The thatched roof formed the ceiling of the one in which he stood, and was about eight feet from the ground in the lowest part.

The two beams ran lengthwise across it, from which many articles were suspended.

The walls appeared to be nothing but mud and timber; the whole building seemed very roughly constructed.

There was no window whatever, so that in the daytime the only aperture through which light could enter was the door.

He made the tour of this room several times, carefully examining the walls and roof, as well as the rough flooring.

There was nothing, however, to raise the least suspicion. All seemed quite ordinary and commonplace.

Near the fire-place, however, was a door. He tried it, and found it yielded to his touch.

A gush of cold air blew upon him as the door opened. All was profoundly dark beyond.

The piece of wood which had served him for a torch up to the present moment in a most satisfactory manner, now gave unequivocal symptoms of expiring.

It was, however, very little trouble to choose a fresh one from the many burning on the hearth, and, having done so, he proceeded to examine what there was on the other side of the door.

He did not anticipate making any particular discovery, because the room appeared to be on a level with the one he had just left, whereas the man had spoken of "down below," which, Dick considered, could only refer to some underground apartment.

He entered, therefore, without hesitation.

A strong current of air came from the other end of this room, and Dick had some trouble to keep his extemporized torch alight.

He got on much better, though, when he closed the door behind him, as he did away with the draught.

The room, or whatever it might be called, was very much larger than the one he had left, though precisely similar in appearance.

At the farther extremity was a door perforated with several large holes, and it was through these the wind came.

This door opened by means of a string latch. As it swung back upon its hinges, Dick saw it simply led into a rude kind of shed, which would serve as a resting-place for cattle.

The moon's rays fell into this place, and he saw the greatest portion of it with perfect plainness. It was quite empty.

Outside, the tall trees in the wood waved gently to and fro in the wind.

It was, then, apparently nothing more than a simple wood hut, and such as might have been used and built by a man who got a living in the woods.

He was somewhat disappointed; but feeling assured that there was nothing further to be seen by going forward, he retraced his steps.

He very particularly examined the flooring as he did so.

The first apartment, or the one in which was the fire, was gained without his having made any discovery whatever.

As he had done in returning through the other room, he held the torch low down on the floor, and went carefully over every square foot of it, in the hope of discovering some indications of a trap-door, but with no better success.

However, once as he came up to the edge of the hearth-stone, he fancied he saw a faint line of light running along it.

A closer observation showed him that when his eye was perpendicular to the stone, he could see this line of narrow light running completely round it.

Here, then, doubtless, was the aperture which he sought.

The fire having gone some time without replenishment, was now almost extinct, so Dick easily enough swept off the embers which remained, so as to get a good view of the hearthstone.

What was his surprise to find the fire had covered a stout iron ring, some three or four inches in diameter, which appeared to be very firmly fixed in the stone, and evidently intended as a means of raising it from its setting.

Dick cooled and raised it with one hand, and round it required but a small exertion of strength to pull it upwards.

It opened after the fashion of most trap-doors; that is to say, it was hung upon two hinges.

When the stone was upright, Dick peeped over the edge of it, and discovered a rude flight of steps, which were lighted by an iron oil lamp.

It was the rays from this light which he had seen through the chink of the hearthstone, and had led to the discovery of the secret door.

"Ah," he said, as he saw it, "it was most certainly a grand mistake to put a light there, however convenient it might be for those who had to ascend or descend the steps. If all had been in darkness I should never have

discovered it, for few people, I fancy, would have thought of looking under the ashes of the fire for an entrance 'down below,' as my friend in the corner called it."

Propping up, then, the stone, as well as he was able, Dick, without hesitation, commenced the descent of the steps.

They were twenty in number.

The lamp was suspended from the arched roof of a passage, which ran along horizontally from the staircase.

It was a very difficult job, but Dick at length did succeed in detaching the lamp from its position.

This would be an invaluable aid to him in his researches. So, holding it up so as to diffuse its rays as much as possible, he proceeded cautiously along the passage.

In the other hand he held a small steel crowbar, which he had taken from a pocket in his coat, made expressly for it. Not more than an inch in diameter, nor more than fourteen or fifteen in length, it would prove a most dangerous and formidable weapon of defence for close quarters.

The passage along which he made his way was simply hollowed out of the earth, and supported at irregular distances by rough pieces of timber. The floor, roof, and walls had been hammered hard and flat by some heavy instrument. It was only a few feet in length, and at its further extremity was a massive-looking wooden door.

This Dick reached in half-a-dozen steps. He ran his eye over it, but no fastenings of any kind were visible, nor was there even a keyhole.

Of course, there were very few doors that would have presented an insurmountable barrier to Dick; still, before he proceeded to violence, he determined to see if he could not open it by fair means.

After a few futile efforts he abandoned the idea.

"It's no go!" he said, "and yet I am not half satisfied. There must be some ready means of opening this door, if I could only find them out. However, I'll get through somehow."

He placed the lamp upon the passage floor as he spoke, and in such a position as its beams fell clearly upon the door.

"Now," he said, reflectively, "I wonder if there really is no one on the other side of the door. From the way my treacherous friend spoke I fancy there must be somebody, but yet not anyone who would assist him. If he has any friends I certainly hope they will not return until I have made my explorations. Now, it strikes me the very wisest thing I can do will be to go back again and barricade the door as well as I am able, so that if they should come back they will have a little trouble in effecting an entrance.

There was so much sense in this reflection that he there and then picked up his lamp and prepared to put his resolve into execution.

A dismal, smothered kind of groan, at that very moment smote his ears.

He could not help giving a slight start as the unexpected sound echoed through the vaulted passage.

"Who's that?" he said.

All was still.

He turned round again and faced the door, for it was quite evident the groan must have come from the other side of it.

"There's some one in trouble, that's clear," said Dick after a pause of a few minutes. "Hilloa! there! Who are you? Hilloa!"

The massive door seemed to beat back his words.

They met with no response.

"Ah! well, I shall find all out soon, I hope, but I will go first and blockade the door."

He walked rapidly along the passage, and ascended the little flight of steps.

Had it not been for the lamp he carried the place would have been in pitch darkness, for the scattered embers of the fire were totally extinguished.

Bess was reposing very quietly in the corner where she had been littered down. He merely gave her a passing glance to make sure all was right, and then went to the door.

Once there, he could not resist opening it, and looking out, so as to discover whether there was any one within sight or hearing.

The silence was most intense.

As he expected, he had quite, by taking a refuge in the wood, thrown the officers off the scent.

He re-entered the hut, and closed the door.

He found behind it a very thick oak beam of wood, which was fastened to the door by a rivet in the centre, and fitted in a staple on each door-post.

"They won't open that very easily," he said, as he fixed the oak bar in its place.

Just then his eye fell upon the woodman, whom he had bound and thrown into the corner in so unceremonious a fashion. He was lying still and immovable in the position in which he had fallen, and he was to all appearances quite dead.

Then Dick bent himself of the other door, opening into the shed, and he secured that as well as he was able.

Feeling then tolerably secure, he once more commenced the descent of the steps which the hearthstone had disclosed.

He hesitated a moment as to whether he should leave the hearthstone up as it was, or let it down into its place; but, after a minute's consideration, he resolved to leave it propped open.

In another minute now—for he had got familiar with the place—he was standing at the massive door through which the groans he had heard appeared to penetrate, though his voice had failed to do so.

He took the steel bar again into his hands and inserted the sharp point into the mortice of the door.

Then he pressed against the other end strongly and steadily, and although the door started a little from the pressure, it did not give way. Still it gave him a better opportunity of inserting the crowbar; so much so indeed, that, at the second trial, he had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing it swing open.

Then he picked up the lamp quickly, and held the crowbar in a defensive attitude.

Another deep groan from the cavern—or whatever it was before him—came with fearful distinctness to his ears.

A close, stifling atmosphere gushed out through the door, beyond which all was utter darkness.

Slowly and cautiously, and taking care to find a firm place to put his foot upon before he lifted the other from the ground, Dick crossed the mysterious threshold.

As he did so, the lamp emitted only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays, which in a very insufficient manner dispelled the darkness which seemed to Dick to be rolling about in huge clouds.

The air had a hot, clammy, disagreeable flavour, and was besides excessively oppressive, so much so, that the highwayman felt it pressing upon his heart and brain until he grew sick and faint.

Then he reeled out of the cavern into the passage, and was forced to lean against the wall for a considerable time before he could recover himself.

The fresh, cool air, however—for so by comparison it seemed to be—rushed down gratefully from the room above, and, mingling with the lethiferous vapour, deprived it of its noxious qualities.

Then once more came the deep, hollow, corpse-like groan, but now much louder and by far more unearthly in its tone; it seemed to fill all the atmosphere around him.

And yet, for the life of him, Dick could not tell from whence the sound appeared to come; it seemed to reach his ears from all sides.

The flame of the lamp was getting dimmer and dimmer.

Was, then, the air in that cavernous-like place so impure as not to be able to support the combustion of the wick?

Surely no; for if it were so, then no human being could possibly for many minutes live in it; and did not the groan point to the existence of someone there who was, doubtless, suffering much agony?

As this thought crossed his mind, the question was unbidden to his lips:

"Was it from human lips so horrible a groan had come?"

CHAPTER IV.

DICK TURPIN MAKES A HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IN THE CELL BENEATH THE WOODMAN'S HUT.

AND now, as minute after minute passed, and the fresh air from the room above entered the passage, Dick felt his lungs beginning to resume their wonted healthy action.

He no longer gasped for breath, and the dull, heavy sensation which had come over him had left his brain and eyelids.

Stooping down, then, and taking the lamp again in his hands—for when he leaned half-fainting against the wall, he had placed it upon the ground—Dick tried if he could make it give a better light.

Then he found that the dimness of the flame proceeded chiefly from the fact that only a small quantity of oil, and that very thick and glutinous, remained in the reservoir of the lamp. However, by altering the wick, he did succeed in making it burn a little better.

It was, though, self-evident that if he wished to prosecute his researches in that strange, gloomy-looking place, by its aid he must do so without loss of time.

Once more, then, Dick, holding the lamp in his left hand and the steel crowbar in his right hand, passed through the ghostly-looking portal.

He experienced but little difficulty in breathing now; the air had a strange odour, but that was all.

"Upon my word," said Dick, as he paused after taking a few steps, "I have many a time heard of making darkness visible, but I must say I never in my life had a better exemplification of it than I have now!"

He might well think so, for the faint light the lamp gave was totally inadequate to disperse the "black darkness" with which the cavern seemed literally filled.

Naturally enough, too, he felt timid about his footing in that place, for he did not know how far the level floor extended, or how soon he might find himself upon the verge of some deep declivity too late to save himself from tumbling headlong down.

The silence which followed the utterance of the last groan was something terrible, and Dick found it growing more and more so each moment; so he was fain to speak his thoughts and speculations as to the place he was in aloud.

"I wonder, now, what this place can be? Some robber's haunt, I fancy; and yet it seems strange it should be filled with mephitic vapour, as it was. The place is full of mystery, and—confound it all, what's that?"

These last few words were spoken in a very different tone to the others. In walking forward his head had struck violently against something depending from the ceiling, but what it was he could form no idea.

With the help of the lamp, which threatened every minute to go out, he saw the object which had given him the blow upon the forehead.

It was another lamp, much larger in size than the one he held in his hand, attached by a thick iron chain to a kind of staple in the roof.

"Confound the thing!" said Dick, again; "what a crack it gave me, to be sure! Why on earth didn't they hang it out of reach of one's head? Stop, now, I wonder whether there's any oil in it?"

He felt the wick with his fingers, and found it sticky and wet, and on applying the flame of the smaller lamp it readily enough ignited.

It was a minute or two before it fairly burnt up, but when it did, it cast a tolerable light over the whole of the cavern.

There was only one or two distant corners into which its beams did not penetrate.

As nearly as he could estimate, the cave was about forty feet in length by thirty in width.

A large table and some benches were ranged round the walls.

Beyond that there was no furniture in the place. Dick felt disappointed, when he, having given a good look round, found it such an ordinary place.

In shape it was exceedingly irregular, and full of corners. Like the hut above, it was very rudely fashioned.

"Ah!" said Dick, after he had taken in the general aspect of the cavern, "this is a snug little residence, and no mistake. I must have a closer look into it, and try if I cannot find out the individual who groaned in so uncom-



[THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN.]

fortable manner. "I wonder if this lamp will come down like the other did?"

He tried, and found it would not, but he managed to disengage the portion holding the oil and the wick. To be sure, it was not very nice to lay hold of, but Dick never troubled about trifles.

In the corner which was in the deepest shadow, Dick found a curious-looking door.

It needed a sharp eye to distinguish it from the surrounding walls, for it was precisely the same colour, and it was more by accident than anything else that Dick's eye fell upon the chink that ran round it.

There was a circumstance connected with this door that filled Dick with astonishment.

A thin wreath of whitish-looking smoke made its way slowly through the crevice round it.

That, then, evidently was the source from whence the deadly vapour emanated.

An intense desire to know what was on the other side of this door occupied Dick's mind, to the exclusion of everything else.

He put the lamp down on the floor, at a little distance from him, and with the steel bar which had before aided him so materially, commenced an attack upon it.

It was some time before it yielded in the least degree to his efforts.

At last it gave way.

It was well Dick possessed sufficient presence of mind to throw himself instantly upon his face, for a perfect cloud of white vapour poured into the outer cavern.

The inner chamber must have been filled with it to the entire exclusion of the wholesome air, for it rushed out in incredible quantities.

By holding his face close to the earth, Dick managed to escape the greater part of it. He lay quite still, because he knew that it would soon disperse.

He cast an anxious glance towards his lamp, but, though its light was not so brilliant, he found it burning steadily.

The dense vapour rolled above and around him, and seemed as if it would never disperse. The time appeared doubly long to Dick, for he was in the highest degree impatient to know what it all meant.

After waiting a few moments longer, he ventured to rise to his feet.

The cavern was getting clearer.

He could see but a very short distance in advance of him.

As he approached the inner door he felt the air grow hotter and hotter.

His eyelids smarted and tingled as they do sometimes in a London fog.

Disregarding this, he boldly stepped into what in his mind he could not help calling the mysterious chamber. He increased his caution.

The floor was hard and solid to the feet.

The inner cavern, or cell, was very limited in its dimensions. By stretching out his arms he could almost touch the wall on all sides, while the roof was hardly high enough for him to stand upright.

Suddenly he drew back the foot he was about to place upon the floor. He had trod upon something soft.

It sent a disagreeable thrill through his veins, for some instinctive feeling seemed to tell him what it was.

He held the lamp down on the floor, and looked at the object upon which he had put his foot.

It was a human hand.

It was in some inexplicable way puffed up to thrice its natural size, and the skin was stretched so tightly over it that the whole seemed like some huge blister.

Full of surprise and wonder, Dick looked still closer, and then he saw, lying stiff and rigid, the body of a man.

It was swollen in the same proportion as the hand.

There was not the slightest sign of vitality about it.

The body was that of a tall, powerful man. He was rudely clad in a garb which was a strange compound between that of a gamekeeper and farm labourer.

The face presented a frightful spectacle; so frightful, indeed, that after one brief glance, Dick turned away his head appalled.

There was upon the terribly bloated and disfigured features an expression in which a whole world of agony was depicted.

"This, then," said Dick, as he turned away his eyes, "this, then, is the poor, miserable wretch whose groans came upon my ears with so horrible a cadence. Who can he have been, and what can he have done to meet with such a fate as this? However, all speculation upon the subject can be of no avail. I would, though, give something to know the explanation of it, for it cannot fail to be of startling interest."

After one more glance round the cell, for it was nothing else, Dick turned round as if to leave.

As he reached the threshold, he paused reflectively.

"Ought I," he said, "to leave this place until I have assured myself that no spark of life yet clings to the pained, bloated carcass? No," he added, "I must return."

It was very unwillingly, however, that he again approached the body.

He knelt down by the side of it, and, removing some portion of the clothing, placed his hand, as nearly as he could judge, above the heart.

The skin was burning hot.

He felt a slight flutter beneath his fingers, but so slight as to be almost imperceptible.

"He lives! he lives!" he said; "perhaps even now I may hear the strange story of his sufferings from his own lips."

He nerved himself to look upon his face.

It was a loathsome colour.

The features were normally, no doubt, regular and bold. The eyebrows were jet black, and so, too, was his hair. But his countenance, swelled to the exaggerated size it was, had almost lost all traces of its configuration.

The eyes, which were staring blindly open, looked strangely small in comparison with the size of the face.

Overcoming his repugnance, Dick slowly raised the body to a sitting posture.

A strange half-sigh, half-groan, issued from the distorted lips.

"Come, Mr. What's-your-name, rouse up a bit, I dare-

say you are in a very bad way, but you might be worse you know. How do you feel now?"

All was still.

Dick listened in vain for a reply.

Then a slight shudder overspread the body of the man.

"Ah!" said Dick, as he felt it, "I am sadly afraid it's all over with him, poor fellow!"

He laid him on the floor of the cell as he spoke.

He replaced his hand upon his heart, but its pulsations had ceased to be perceptible.

"One thing is certain," said Dick, as he once more prepared to depart, "of all the strange adventures I have met with in my career, this is certainly the strangest of them all."

He closed the door of the cell, and once more glanced round the cave, so as to impress its appearance upon his memory. Then he walked slowly to the foot of the little flight of steps.

As he placed his foot upon the first one, a loud and impatient knocking at the outer door reached his ears.

CHAPTER V.

THE ROBBERS IN THE WOOD RETURN, AND MAKE AN ATTACK ON DICK TURPIN.

Now, when Dick heard the knocking at the door of the hut, he did what was an unusual thing for him indeed.

He stood still, undecided how to act.

The first question which crossed his mind was whether those who were clamouring so loudly for admission were police officers or some of those bold, reckless men who doubtless made the cave beneath the hut their hiding and abiding place.

He was inclined to think the latter as being the most probable.

He placed the lamp upon the floor, and stealthily ascended the steps on tiptoe.

His position was most unquestionably full of peril, for it was only natural to suppose that if these men were sufficiently inhuman to doom one of their comrades to so terrible a death, they would not scruple to put him out of the way of divulging any of their secrets.

"They're an uncommon bad lot, that's certain," said Dick; "and, as I cannot get any profit by encountering them, I think the very best thing I can do will be to get clear off, if possible, without letting them know anything about it."

Having come to this determination, he crept stealthily along the floor of the hut until he came to Black Bess.

He patted her encouragingly upon the neck, and slipped the bridle over his arm.

As he was close by the door, he stopped to listen.

The knocking had ceased, and the confused murmur of several voices alone came to his ears.

He could not distinguish a single word.

Without, therefore, pausing a moment longer, Dick led Bess across the room to the door which opened into the outer apartment.

The fresh, cool air that gushed in refreshed him exceedingly.

Just as he was about to close this door, he heard the sharp report of a pistol, and the bullet crashing through the panel.

The men outside, to the number of five or six, and who, as Dick had rightly enough conjectured, were members of the band of robbers who made that lonely hut their home, were evidently getting angry and impatient at this disregard of their summons.

"Fire away!" said Dick, "nobody cares!"

Before opening the little door which led into the shed, Dick thought it would only be prudent to listen for a while, and ascertain, if possible, whether any of the woodman's companions, finding it impossible to obtain an entrance from the front of the hut, would go round to the back of it.

He looked through the holes which were perforated in the door, but saw nothing.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, he heard a rustling among the trees.

Keeping both ears and eyes open, he waited patiently for what should happen next.

Three swarthy, ill-favoured, gipsy-like looking men emerged from the trees.

The moonlight, which was even brighter than when he had looked out a short time before, revealed their figures with great distinctness.

Looking straight before them, and without pausing for a moment, these men approached the door behind which Turpin stood.

From their confident step they evidently anticipated no difficulty in opening this door.

When they tried it they found it firm and immovable. Dick stood a little on one side, for he thought it not unlikely they would, in their disappointment, fire a bullet through that door as they had through the other.

The men, however, drew back to a short distance, and spoke in a low tone to each other.

"I wish I could hit on some plan of scaring these scoundrels. I'll warrant they are as arrant cowards as ever put shoes on their feet. What can I think of? Surely I ought to be able to think of something."

He rubbed his head in a perplexed, absent sort of way. It was no use, though, he could not rub an idea into it. The act of keeping his eye upon what the men were about prevented his elaborating any plan of action.

He now saw two of the men withdraw, leaving the other as a kind of guard.

"They have gone round to their friends in front, I suppose. I wonder what they think of it?"

The robbers appeared to be alarmed about something. They seemed to dread taking any vigorous steps. No doubt they were puzzled how to account for the hut being barricaded against them.

From some reason or other they appeared to be aware that their hut had been taken possession of by some one, but, of course, whether by one person or twenty they could have no idea.

Then Dick saw the two men who had just left return, accompanied by three others.

All six then entered the shed.

"Shaw is right," said one.

"Well, it's quite certain, whether he's right or wrong, that if the bar is really up behind the other door, there will be little hope of forcing it, for it was made purposely to resist any attack that might be made upon it."

"Yes, yes."

"Some one must have entered this place, and, no doubt, discovered all. As the doors are all fastened, he must be inside."

"Comrades," said another, "it is some spy, and we are lost. Are you agreed that he shall die?"

"All—all!" they cried.

"Thank you," said Dick to himself. "But it strikes me you are counting your chickens before they are hatched."

Then the man who had so logically concluded that there must be some one inside the hut unfriendly to them, spoke again—

"This door before us, and the existence of which no one would suspect when standing in this shed, because it is made of the same materials as the walls, is by no means so strong, and if we all strive with a will we shall easily enough force it open, and then death—death to the intruder."

"Yes—death!" said the others.

"You make a mistake," said Dick, mentally, "if you think you can frighten me by any such threats—"

He was interrupted by the man who had taken so prominent a part in the council saying rapidly—

"The trunk—the trunk!"

To the intense surprise of Dick, no sooner were these words spoken, than they dashed rapidly into the wood. This furnished him with matter for speculation.

"The trunk?" he repeated. "Whatever can they mean by saying, 'The trunk—the trunk!' and then running off like a parcel of madmen. I can't make them out at all. I think the very best thing I can do is to be off!"

He put his hand on the fastenings of the door.

"Stop, now," he said, as a second thought entered his head. "I may fall into a snare of some kind. Never mind, here goes."

He was too late.

He heard the sounds of men's footsteps approaching.

"Here they are back again. I wonder what they meant by 'trunk'?"

It was a great puzzle to Dick, and he was anxious in the extreme to know what it was.

They did not keep him long in suspense.

The six men made their appearance again in front of the shed, carrying the trunk of a small tree upon their shoulders.

"Oh, I see now," said Dick; "how ever was it I did not think of that before? It was the trunk of a tree that they meant. It looks as though it had been cut down some time, and laid on the ground in the wet. They are going to smash the door in with it."

The intention of the robbers was now only too apparent. With a ready thought, that had struck them all at once, as soon as the word "trunk" was uttered by their comrade, they one and all remembered the trunk of a tree which had lain for many a day in the clearing in the front of the hut.

Then all, actuated by one impulse, darted off to fetch it. That was the moment Dick should have seized upon to make his escape; but while he was engulding his brains to think what they meant, the opportunity was lost.

The trunk which the men carried was quite denuded of its branches. No doubt they had, from time to time, been lopped off for firewood.

It was about ten feet in length by two in diameter. The men, three on each side, made a pause, and settled it firmly upon their shoulders.

The thickest end was turned towards the door, and when the men carrying it rushed forward and used it as a battering-ram, there were very few doors that could have held upon their hinges.

Dick's position was getting critical, for at close quarters six to one is rather long odds.

"Forward! forward!" shouted the man nearest the large end of the tree.

Encircling it with their arms, the men ran forwards, and the rude battering-ram came with a terrific crash against the door.

Still, it did not give way completely. It was strongly made, and kept its place bravely; but another such a blow as that which it had just received must inevitably demolish it.

"Back! back! mates; back! One more blow, and the door is open."

The men gave a cheer as they drew back, and prepared for another charge.

They rushed forward with great impetuosity, with thrice as much as was required indeed, for the door gave way in a moment; and as they had prepared to meet with a much greater amount of resistance, they, as a natural result, went sprawling into the hut, with the tree on top of them.

They did not appear, though, to have sustained much damage, for, in an inconceivably short time they had risen to their feet.

All cast a rapid glance around them.

The bright moon lighted up the place in almost every part.

The hut was empty.

Dick had immediately after the first blow retired to the other apartment.

The door which connected the two rooms opened inwardly, so he stood a better chance of securing it than he would if it had opened outwards. His eye lighted upon the chest from which the man had produced the bottle of brandy. It was large and heavy, and Dick dragged it with difficulty along the floor and placed it against the door.

Of course it would not form any great obstacle, but still it would hinder their entrance for a moment or two.

He had just finished placing it in its position when he heard the men dash up against it.

"If now," he said, "I could only have a peep outside this door to see what is going on in front, but, as I can't I shall have to take my luck."

He unfastened the door, so that it would at any moment swing open.

Then he mounted his steed.

Crash—crash came the blows upon the inner door.

Feeling there was not a second to lose, Dick guided Bess to the front door of the hut.

By leaning forward in his saddle he could take hold of its edge.

He bent down his head to a level with Bess's ears, and held the reins firmly with his left hand.

Then he pulled the door quickly open and dashed out into the clearing.

A loud shout from several men in front mingled with that uttered by those who were within as he did so.

"The spy! the spy!" they cried. "That's him! Stop him! Stop him!"

Several men darted out from the shadow of the trees and endeavoured to seize Bess by the bridle.

They might as well have tried to arrest the flight of an eagle.

Several shots were fired by those in the rear, and a sudden shock, like a stroke with a stick, unaccompanied by pain, made Dick aware he had been hit in the shoulder. It was his left one.

He pulled up and turned round upon his foes. Their numbers had increased to near a score.

They stood huddled together in a dense throng. They had all paused on seeing Dick suddenly wheel round.

He had a pistol in his right hand. "Fall back into the hut," he cried in stentorian tones.

"Fall back all, or I fire."

Instinctively the men retreated a few paces.

"Forward—forward! let not the spy escape. Are ye such cowards that ye shrink from one man? He has learned our secret and will betray us. Capture him, alive or dead!"

The man who pronounced these words appeared to hold the post of captain to the troop, for, though he gave such valorous orders, he himself very prudently kept in the background.

Dick laughed as he said—

"I hold here the life of one man. Which of you is willing to be that one?"

None stirred.

They were cowards as it was, but Dick's resolute bearing, and the conviction that one of them must receive the contents of the pistol, did not enhance their valour.

They drew back yet further towards the door of the hut.

"On! on! After him! after him!" again shouted their prudent captain. "Capture him, my gallant hearts!"

Dick could not help feeling amused at the idea of twenty men holding back from attacking him.

An open kind of glade was before him, so, firing his pistol at random in the midst of the banditti, Dick turned his mare's head and galloped away.

As soon as they saw his back the men hastened to pursue him, and Dick heard them give a loud shout, intended no doubt to buoy up their courage.

"What a ridiculous termination to so horrible an adventure. They are the rankest cowards I ever met with, and no mistake. I suppose their achievements consist for the most part in plundering a henroost. I am, however, far from being satisfied; I would give a great deal to hear the story of that poor fellow whom I found in the underground cell."

Full of these thoughts Dick reached the lane which bordered the wood.

He looked behind him, but no traces of his pursuers were visible.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING WITH THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN IN THE

LANE.

"What a glorious night!" said Dick, as he looked up and down the quiet shady lane.

The moon was at the full, and had just passed the meridian.

Far and wide, over hill and dale, tree and meadow, hill and stream, fell the flood of silvery lustre which she poured forth.

It lighted up, too, with a rare brilliancy and beauty, the numerous objects in the fertile landscape.

Dick stood upon a piece of slightly rising ground which commanded a splendid view of the surrounding scenery.

Reposing on the northern horizon, like some giant cloud, was the mass of buildings of which the city of London is composed.

Above them all towered the mighty dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

The gilding on the summit of the monument glistened faintly in the mellowed light.

But not for long did the highwayman remain gazing at the beauty of the scene. He was anxious to reach London, and turning Bess's head in that direction, he gave her the rein freely.

And now, as both horse and rider are for the moment in comparative safety, we will rest for a few moments from the recital of the varied incidents which occurred on this most eventful night.

We wish, if possible, to combat in the space of a few lines the objections which have been raised to making a highwayman the hero of romance.

We feel sure some of our readers will be willing to listen to our arguments.

First, then, it has been urged, and with some apparent reason, that the narration of such romantic incidents as pertain to a highwayman's career would tend to make the thoughtless endeavour to imitate them.

Before we consider this question, it ought to be clearly borne in mind that no small amount of the interest which such a tale excites is due to the fact that the Knight of the Road is essentially a thing of the past.

It is well known how the influence of time softens the asperities of all things, and it has not omitted to throw a gloss over the highwayman's exploits.

Now we ourselves cannot for a moment think it possible that anyone, let him be ever so unreflective, could be ridiculous enough, in these days, to attempt to imitate their deeds.

In fact, the bold highwayman who cried "Stand and deliver!" upon the road, has got to be considered in the light of a species of knight-errant, whose chief business was to redress such social wrongs as came under his immediate notice in the course of the many adventures among high and low, which must necessarily fall to his lot, and this is why we follow him with pleasure. Were scenes of violence alone depicted, the only feeling that would be called into existence would be disgust at his atrocities.

"Such, then, being the case, it must be self-evident that it is not his obnoxiousness to the laws of the land nor the crimes of which he may have been guilty, that draws the attention of the reader, but his courage, address, single-mindedness, and opposition of all kinds of oppression.

When we carry the fancy back a hundred years, we picture society as something very different to what it is in the present day. Law and justice were not so impartially administered then as they are now, and it must be conceded that there is yet ample room for improvement.

But nothing causes so great a change in manners and customs as increase in the speed of locomotion.

The lumbering stage-coach, with its bluff coachman and thick-headed guard, has given place to the railway train, so his occupation having gone, the day of the highwayman has passed away never to return.

Besides, the person who was weak-minded enough to think he could achieve the feats ascribed to heroes such as ours, would be just as likely, after reading some romance of chivalry, to don a suit of armour, and set out in quest of adventures, like Don Quixote.

Now no one thinks of stigmatizing as improper the romances in which mailed warriors and crusaders take a part, and yet it appears to us, the objection raised applies to them with equal force.

The truth is, that those persons whose ordinary life is monotonous and void of incident devour with avidity all tales of wild and wonderful adventure, for the simple reason that they present so vivid and remarkable a contrast to the routine of their own existence.

To all of these we promise in our pages a rich mine of entertainment; but we wish them to remember the work is a romance—nothing more.

Meanwhile Dick has trotted swiftly down the lane in the direction of London.

The high road is gained and crossed, and down another narrow lane, which will abbreviate the distance to be travelled, he takes his way.

Soaking slowly through his coat and trickling down on to Bess's flanks, came the blood from the wound in his left shoulder.

It was scarcely more than a mere scratch. The bullet, which had been fired by the robbers in the wood, had

ploughed up the flesh on his shoulder, but had not touched the bone in its passage.

It bled freely, and to this circumstance may be attributed the total absence of pain. He heeded it not in the least, and had even forgotten he had been wounded.

But slowly and constantly welled forth the current of life, and fell with a faint, almost inaudible, drip upon the ground in the country lane.

Not for long, however, can he remain insensible to the fearful loss of blood.

Still he galloped onward.

All was beautifully calm. No sound, save the beat of Bess's hoofs, and the rustling of the foliage on each side of him, broke the delicious silence.

Before him, and high up in the heavens, was the bright, full moon, travelling apparently at the same rate as himself and ever keeping the same distance in advance.

Occasionally a light fleecy cloud would sweep over her disc, obscuring her brilliancy for a moment, and then sail away across the sky, but that was all.

It was a night which could not fail to make a deep impression upon any reasoning being. The deep silence and repose around seemed to steal into the mind and create a corresponding influence upon the soul. It seemed to chasten and soften down the thoughts as the moonlight chastened material objects.

Then the aspect of the lane changed.

The low hedgerows gave place to high ones, while here and there a thick group of elms and poplars cast a deep black shadow on the roadway.

Dick still pressed on. Once or twice he felt a strange sensation of weakness, and a kind of mist floated before his eyes.

A slight smarting from the wound in his shoulder now attracted his attention, and he placed his right hand upon it.

To his surprise, he found his coat sopping wet.

He withdrew his hand with a puzzled air.

Oh! I remember now," he said; "one of those rascals scratched me with a bullet, and I suppose it has been bleeding ever since."

He moved his arm about to ascertain whether the joint had been injured in any way, but he felt nothing more than a little stiffness.

"Oh! it's all right," he said. "I must manage to bind it up in some way; I wish I had discovered it earlier."

While speaking he untied his voluminous cravat, and, though it was rather an awkward job, succeeded in bandaging the wound and stanching the blood.

"That's better! I shall get on now, I fancy."

But he had lost more blood than he imagined, and he felt his head swim, and he reeled in his saddle.

"Woe! gently! hold up!" he said, clutching Bess's mane. "Woe now!"

He recovered himself by an effort, and pricking his mare gently with a spur, continued on his way.

A dull red mist seemed to obscure his vision, but by degrees it cleared away.

Then, as he looked in advance of him, he fancied he could see in the far distance something in motion, but he could not determine what it was, for it was so confounded with the shadows at the end of the lane that it was hardly distinguishable.

Presently, however, it began to assume the form of a horse and rider.

It looked, though, strangely dim and undefined.

It approached with a peculiar gliding, undulating movement.

What puzzled him most was, that though he bent forward in the saddle and listened, and though all around was so profoundly silent, no sound of the horse's feet striking against the road came to his ears.

And still onward, nearer, nearer, with the same gliding, stealthy motion, came the mysterious steed.

Dick felt a vague feeling of alarm—it could scarcely be called terror—creeping over him.

This was in a great measure, no doubt, produced by the great quantity of blood which he had lost.

He made a strong effort to shake it off.

It was in vain.

Then he became conscious that Bess was trembling violently.

His hands wandered to the holsters.

And now the spectral-looking horseman reached a spot

where no shadows fell upon the lane, and was plainly revealed by the pale moonbeams.

The misty, shadowy look had disappeared.

Both horse and rider were defined with extraordinary clearness.

Involuntarily, as his eye rested upon them, a cry of astonishment issued from his lips.

And well there might.

He fancied he must be dreaming.

The mysterious rider was a perfect reflex of himself.

The steed of his own mare, Black Bess.

He saw the whole as plainly as if he had stood before a gigantic looking-glass.

He closed his eyes, fancying for a moment that what he saw was but the creation of his own brain; and when he opened them again it was with the firm conviction that when he did so the apparition would have vanished.

But no; there it stood, and apparently ten times more palpable than before.

He ran his eye over the costume.

There was the same rakish-looking hat, with its long trailing feather, the same gold-faced scarlet coat, the same high boots—all was most exact.

In a moment, all that he had ever heard respecting the appearance of such an object being a foretold of death flashed through his mind; and, although it could not absolutely be said that he placed credence in such stories, yet, when he saw approaching, and at no great distance from him, a form which he was convinced was no illusion, a cold chill crept over him, and the blood seemed to gush back suddenly to his heart.

His breath came short and thick.

"What can it mean?" he said, faintly.

As he spoke, the mysterious horseman suddenly leaped the hedge, and sped over the meadows until he reached a little knoll, where he stood still and immovable.

As for Bess, she seemed as if changed to stone. Her neck was outstretched towards the spectre steed, and her eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. Her mane was erect and her sides wet with perspiration.

How long Dick gazed he knew not, but suddenly a cloud passed over the moon's face, and cast a temporary darkness around.

When she peeped forth again the spectre horseman had disappeared.

Dick gave a sigh of relief.

"This is very, very strange," he said. "What can be the meaning of this assumption of my own form and features? I feel sick and faint. My brain is heavy and my arms paralyzed. Can it be possible that I have bled to death?"

His heart pulsated at twice its usual speed as this question crossed his mind, and he leaned forward heavily upon the neck of his steed.

In a few moments, however, the deathlike faintness which had come over him passed away, and as he settled himself properly in the saddle, he passed his hand two or three times over his brow, and looked in a bewildered sort of fashion about him.

All was still and silent. No other living, moving object could be anywhere distinguished.

He urged Bess forwards.

Filled with strange thoughts and sensations to which he had hitherto been a stranger, Dick proceeded on his way to London, nor did he draw rein again until he stood upon the old bridge at Blackfriars.

A cool, refreshing breeze came from the surface of the water, and Dick paused for a few moments in order to enjoy it, for it came very gratefully upon his fevered brain.

There were a few vessels even at that hour moving lazily on the river.

He watched them for some moments.

It was wonderful what a difference the cool breeze made to Dick; he felt himself revive rapidly.

Then he spoke—

"I am better now—much better. I feel, though, very, very weary, and am glad I have reached London. I will make my way at once to where I can have an hour or two's repose."

He proceeded at a gentle pace up Bridge-street, and so on across Fleet-street into Farringdon-street, and past the gloomy old Fleet Prison.

Then he plunged into the mass of narrow streets and courts which lie between Fleet-street and Holborn-hill.

To-day it is by no means an enviable locality, but a hundred years ago we may reasonably conclude it was at the very least a hundred times worse than it is now.

He threaded his way into Chancery-lane without meeting with a soul.

He made his way to the corner of Carey-street.

Here a watchman had his station, who was supposed to watch over the neighbourhood and protect the houses from the burglar!

Suppose, indeed!

The box was there, but it was empty. Doubtless, the guardian of the night was solacing himself somewhere near at hand.

At almost any other time Dick would have played him some trick, but now he was so thoroughly exhausted he could think of nothing but reaching some place of rest.

Soon, then, he emerged into Drury-lane by way of Princes-street, and, turning to the left, pulled up at the White Horse.

No traces of this ancient inn are left now. It was pulled down many years ago, and the present ginn-palace erected on its site in the south corner of a passage called White Horse-yard.

It was famed all over London as being the resort of all the criminals in town. The landlord was always too well paid by his customers for any reward, however great, to be an inducement for him to betray them, and any of the "family" was sure of finding a safe refuge in his house.

Although it was at an hour when everybody would be supposed to be in bed, yet, when Dick drew up before the old inn, a light was burning in the tap-room.

He alighted, and, instead of entering by the door, led Bess by the bridle down a narrow alley until he reached a small door.

Here he paused, and pressing his thumb against the lintel, waited patiently.

The door swung silently open, and a stout, red-faced man appeared upon the threshold.

He held a lantern in his hand.

"Hullo!" he said, gruffly; then, as he recognized his visitor, he said, in a cordial voice, "Why, Dick lad, is it you? I have not seen you for an age. How mortal pale you are, to be sure! What's the matter?"

Dick smiled languidly as he replied—

"I am wounded, Matthew."

"Eh! wounded?"

"Oh, only slightly, only slightly. A mere scratch; in fact, nothing to speak of."

"Come in, come in, and let me attend to it. Bring your mare with you. I'll see to stabling her all right. Come in, come in."

Dick led Bess over the doorstep as desired, and Matthew, the landlord, carefully closed the door.

It was rather a strange place in which Dick stood, and it well deserves a line or two of description.

In appearance it more resembled the bottom of a well than anything else, only it was square instead of round. The only roof it had was the sky.

It was about eight feet square. That side of it in which the door was placed was a plain brick wall of the same height as the house itself.

The other three sides were simply the external walls of the inn, in which were several windows.

But the strangest thing of all was that a number of pieces of iron, about twelve inches long by one in diameter, were stuck at regular intervals from the floor to the roof, so that a person might by their aid ascend to the house-tops.

These bars were besides arranged so that they passed near every window which looked into this square place. Their use was obvious.

A person could leave any of these rooms without difficulty through the windows; and either go up or down as circumstances might require.

There was a small low door opposite to the one by which Dick had entered, leading into the inn, and another on the left hand leading by a circuitous route to the stables.

It was through this last-mentioned door that the landlord passed, followed by Dick and his mare.

Tired and faint as he was, Dick would not forego

his invariable custom of seeing his mare safely lodged and fed.

This done, he accompanied old Matthew through a maze of wooden corridors, and up a flight of rickety stairs into a small chamber.

"There," said the landlord, putting his lantern on the broad window-sill, and carefully closing the shutters, "you may make yourself perfectly comfortable for twelve hours at least. Here is the bed."

Dick threw himself upon the bed with an air of intense satisfaction.

"Shall I leave the light?"

"No; I shall not want it."

"All right; good night."

"Good night, landlord," replied Dick; "mind you look after my mare."

"Don't trouble about that, my boy. Won't you have something to eat and drink?"

"No, no, thank you," replied Turpin, drowsily.

"Stay till I wake up. That'll do."

"Good night, Dick," said the landlord again.

He waited in vain for a reply.

Dick was fast asleep.

"Ah, well," said old Matthew, as he approached the bed, and cast the light of the lantern upon his face. "He's helpless enough now, and no mistake. However, he shall come to no harm under this roof so long as I am alive. So rest in peace, brave heart, rest in peace."

The landlord slowly left the bedside, and closed the door carefully behind him.

The dawn of the coming day struggled through the triangular-shaped holes in the window shutters, and a faint, leaden-coloured beam of light fell upon the exhausted, slumbering highwayman.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE OFFICER ON THE ROOF OF THE OLD INN IN DRURY LANE.

"Rouse up, Dick! rouse up, lad! Wake up! wake up, come! Here's a couple of redbreasts dropped in. Wake up!"

It was old Matthew Gale, the landlord, who spoke. It seemed to Dick as though he had only just closed his eyes when these words sounded in his ears.

He started up in bed.

"What is it, Matthew, eh? Is the house on fire?"

"No, no; only I saw a couple of officers come in. I didn't stop to see what they wanted, but thought I would wake you up, so that you might be prepared for action if necessary."

"Thanks! thanks! And Bess?"

"Right as a trivet. She's got all her traps on, and you can have her at a moment's notice."

"That is well. Why, dear me, it is getting quite daylight."

"Daylight? Ha! ha! He! he! he! Ha! ha!"

The landlord fairly held his sides.

"Hilloa! What's up? Why do you laugh?"

"Ha! ha! Why, at you, to be sure. The idea of fancying it was getting daylight. Night is closing in quick!"

"Nonsense!"

"It's a fact."

"Then do you mean to say I have been sleeping twelve hours?"

"Well, that's somewhere about the figure, I guess."

"I can scarcely credit it. I thought I had only just closed my eyes when you called me."

"That was because you slept sound. How is your wound?"

"Oh, I fancy it's all right. I feel nothing of it."

"I wouldn't move the bandage yet if I were you," said Matthew, after examining it. "Let it alone, and it will soon get right. Try a glass or two of this; it is the finest old port in my cellar. It will put new blood into you."

"You are thoughtful, my friend. I do feel just the least bit faint."

"I shouldn't wonder. Now, if I were you, I would try a good meal."

"I feel very hungry, I can tell you; but how about the officers you were mentioning?"

"Oh! dear me, what a head I've got! I have been rattling on like this, and quite forgot all about them."

"I can scarcely think they are after me. How could they tell I was anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"Oh! I didn't say they were after you, only I thought you ought not to be asleep while the Philistines were abroad."

"They can't be after me. If they had seen me last night we should have had a visit long before this."

"No doubt, no doubt."

"Just run down, will you, then, and find out the object; and, as soon as you can, come back and let me know."

"I will. Don't be afraid, Dick, lad; you are safer here than you could be anywhere. I'll promise you if the grabs are in search of you I can baffle them without any trouble. So rest in security where you are. You have nothing whatever to fear."

"Well, then, Matthew, I should like you to run down again, and find out, if you can, what it is these officers want."

"All right; but on no account leave the room until I return."

Dick opened the door himself, and allowed the landlord to go out, and, leaning over the balusters, watched him as far down the stairs as he could, and then stood still and listened.

He heard the landlord's footsteps for some moments, and then a door closed, after which all was still.

Then a long pause ensued, when, hearing the door open again, Dick withdrew into his chamber.

In a moment or two afterwards the landlord returned.

"Well?" said Dick, inquiringly.

"It's you they're after. They've got some suspicion you are here, but of course I denied the fact, and told them to search the old place from top to bottom. It will take them some time," he added, complacently.

"No doubt of that."

"The 'White Horse' is fuller of odd nooks and corners than they fancy."

"Have they begun their search?"

"Yes; and as they no doubt think in a very cunning manner. You must not suppose that this staircase is the principal one. It is quite a secondary one, and they may not discover its existence. However, they have all gone straight up to the top of the house, intending to commence their search on the roof and end in the cellar."

"All, do you say?"

"Why, not all, of course. They have left one or two downstairs as a kind of guard; and, no doubt, several more are looking out in the lane and the court, and they would of course raise an alarm if they saw you attempting to leave the premises."

A great hubbub from somewhere above now reached their ear.

"God bless me!" said the landlord, "what's that?"

"They had made some discovery or other, I should fancy. What can it be?"

Old Matthew changed colour a little as he replied—

"I have no idea. However, it appears they have been up to the roof, and come down again. I must leave you now, to go and see what they are after."

"Very good; but how shall I manage if they take it into their heads to come here while you are away?"

"I'll show you. Bess is safe enough, and where they will never find her, so don't let that trouble you."

"Well—well!" said Dick, uneasily.

"Don't put yourself about. Misbegun as the house is, it would be impossible for you to leave it with your mare. I know you don't like to be off her back, but it can't be helped."

"What do you propose, then?"

"Just this. When I go out, shut the door and lock it after me. If the officers don't come, well and good. If they do, look here!"

The landlord went to the window as he spoke.

"Now," he said, "there is something very peculiar indeed about this window. You see, to all appearance, it is nailed up."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, it is only in appearance. Those nail-heads, which stick out so ostentatiously all round the sash, are like a good deal of ostentation in this world—all sham. They are just intended to mislead any one, and nothing

more. The window opens with a hidden spring, in this way."

He pressed on the head of one of the many nails round the sash, and the window rose silently in the groove made for it, and continued to rise so long as the head of the nail was pressed upon.

"Now, of course, you will say," continued the landlord, "that it is just possible, as the spring which opens the window is not concealed, that it may be discovered. But there is not the slightest ground for such a thought. On the contrary, it is more likely to prevent its being found out. You must bear in mind that there are at least fifty nail-heads here altogether, which diminishes the chances of discovery fifty times. Then, if the nails were tampered with, no one would think of driving them in further, as you saw me do, but, on the contrary, would try to pull them out."

There was so much logic in this reasoning that Dick was convinced at once.

"But you haven't seen all of this yet," said old Matthew, with a certain degree of pride, "though the other part is simple enough. Look outside."

Dick put his head through the window, and saw that he was looking into the square, well-like place which he had entered about twelve hours before.

"Those bars," said Matthew, "are mortared very firmly into the wall, and you need not fear their giving way. As soon, then, as you hear the officers at the door, press on the nail; it is the eleventh from the sill, and the window will open as I showed you. Then climb out, and take hold of the bar nearest to you with your right hand, and putting your foot on another one, close the window with your left; you will find it shut down with ease. It will then be immovable, and present to the officers the appearance of having been nailed up for a length of time. An active man like you will, of course, be able to reach the roof without difficulty, and when you have, I must leave you to your own devices."

"And fear not for me, then," said Dick, pressing the landlord's hand; "I shall be right enough, never fear."

"I will leave you, then, for I am full of anxiety to know what the redrestars are doing, and my longer absence might be productive of suspicion."

"Do so—do so."

"I hope," said Dick, "you will be able to lead them off the scent, for I can feel I am dreadfully weak. I must have lost an immense quantity of blood."

"Keep yourself quiet, and don't get excited. I would advise you to lie down on the bed again. You can, if necessary, easily make it appear as though it had never been slept on."

"To be sure. I wish"—

"What?"

"You will smile, but if you will believe me, I am never contented unless Bess is close to me."

"Oh! now don't, I beg, trouble about that. I, as I said just now, may take the officers quite off their scent; and if I do, as it is only a little after nine, you can, as soon as they are gone, make your way down the court into Clare-market, and so gain the open country."

"I shall be glad to do so, and I fancy when once London is behind me, I shall be some time before I return."

"Oh! your wound makes you down-hearted. You will soon be all right."

"Well, leave me now, leave me now. Try and spare me the task of climbing over the roofs, for I feel quite unequal to it."

"Trust to me, I'll do the best I can," said the landlord, leaving the room.

With a wearied air, Dick threw himself upon the bed, and pressed his hands over his temples. There was a throbbing sensation in his head which was distracting and painful in the extreme. His system had been almost drained of blood.

Time passed, and nearly half an hour elapsed after old Matthew left the room before Dick heard anything to indicate the coming of his foe.

Then, as he lay in a half-unconscious state, he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

A minute more, and the hum of many voices mingled with them.

He rose to a sitting posture on the bed. The different objects in the room seemed chasing each other round and round him.

to was in a strange, dreamy state.

Suddenly, the familiar tones of old Matthew's voice struck upon his ears.

He was speaking loudly.

"Of course, of course. Go where you like; I don't care. I only hope you'll find him, that's all."

"Your conduct is very suspicious, Mr. Gale; very suspicious indeed," said a gruff voice.

"As how, I should like to know?" rejoined the landlord. "As how, I say? Have I interfered with you in the least, or said a word to you about turning my house upside down, and ruining my trade? Just answer me that."

"Why, I think your trade would make a good deal of ruining, Mr. Gale. It's no good you putting on an air of injured innocence, for your house is celebrated all over the kingdom as being the resort of the worst of characters."

"Be careful what you're saying, be careful what you're saying. Recollect you're in my house, Mr. Officer."

"I know that," was the reply, given in an irascible voice. "But you just let me catch you out in harbouring or abetting any one, and see if I don't make you smart for it. I shall be sure to do so, sooner or later."

"Oh! indeed, Mr. Clever; oh! indeed. Perhaps you'd like to find me out to-day?"

"I shall, too, or it's a very odd to me, so I wouldn't advise you to crow so loud. What room does this door open into, eh?"

They had reached the threshold of the one in which Dick stood.

While this little conversation was going on, and which, from its rather artificial character, was doubtless got up by old Matthew with the intention of putting Dick on his guard, the latter had, in a great measure, succeeded in shaking off the feeling of faintness which had so weighed upon him.

He smoothed over the bed, and unlocked the door silently, so that the suspicions of the officers should not be aroused by finding it fastened on the inside; and then, rushing to the window, he pressed the spring, and passed quickly out of it.

Taking hold, then, firmly of the bar, as the landlord had directed, he closed the window with his left hand.

As he hung thus suspended, he felt himself seized with a sudden giddiness, and it was by little short of a miracle he saved himself from falling into the yard below.

He looked up, and saw the edge of the roof about ten feet above him.

He sighed as he saw it.

"I can never do it," he said; "I never in my life felt so deadly faint. I must make the effort, though, or they may see me from the window."

He climbed up three or four steps, and paused; he felt that for the moment he was out of danger.

The cool night air blew refreshingly upon him, and every second seemed to bring with it a fresh accession of strength.

No sound reached him from the room below.

How they were getting on of course he could form no sort of idea.

"It will be best for me to ascend the rest of the distance. I shall be able to rest much better on the roof, and I shall no doubt be perfectly secure; for, having searched it once, they will not be likely to look for me again; and, unless I am mistaken, they will leave a man on every staircase as they go on with their search to prevent the possibility of any one making their escape by ascending."

He proceeded to the execution of his design. The remaining bars were ascended with but little difficulty, for he felt he had regained much of his wonted strength, and he found himself in another moment at the edge of the parapet.

To climb over this would be the most dangerous part of the business. He would have to relinquish his hold on the iron bars, and grasping the stonework, draw himself over. But the stone had been there exposed to wind and rain for many a long year, and was much decayed; and as he, with his left hand, strove to take a hold, he as often found a fragment come away in his fingers.

They fell with a slight sound into the yard beneath. Dick shuddered at the time they took to reach it.

However, making a vigorous effort, he scaled the

parapet, and rolled over into the gutter, which surrounded it on the inner side.

It was not a very pleasant place to fall into, for it was filled with black slimy mud, which had from time to time accumulated there, and Dick rose up very much the worse for the contact.

He did not, however, rise immediately to his feet, but lay still for a few moments, and then, raising his head, looked carefully around him.

An angular roof of dark red tiles was on his left hand, and up this he began to climb.

The ascent was rather steep, and he slipped once or twice before he reached the top, along which he crept a few feet, until his farther progress was stayed by a huge stack of chimneys.

"I must get round this," he said, "and on to the roof of the next house, in case any of the officers should make their appearance, then I shall be all right."

Very carefully now, for the attempt was full of peril, Dick crawled round to the other side of the chimneys.

"Now I've caught you, Mr. Dick; now I've caught you," said an exulting voice at this moment; and, before he was aware of it, Dick felt himself clutched tightly round the throat by some one.

It was a Bow-street runner, who had been left there by his superiors to watch if the highwayman made his appearance, and with instructions, in case he should do so, to give an immediate alarm.

But this man did not want for courage, and he resolved, should Dick get out on to the roof, to try his best to capture him single-handed, which would entitle him to the very large reward offered for his apprehension.

He was sitting very composedly on the roof, but yet keeping a sharp look-out around him, when his attention was arrested by hearing a slight sound.

It was the crumbling of the coping as Dick sought to obtain a firm hold of it.

He withdrew instantly, and hid himself behind the chimneys, for he was well aware how great an advantage you have over your enemy if you can pounce upon him unawares.

The officer, too, was also aware how difficult it was to take a foothold on the tiles, especially during a struggle, so he very cunningly had got over the ridge of the roof and to the opposite side, where he held himself in readiness to catch Dick by the throat.

He knew, while he kept his hold upon the highwayman, he could not by any means fall down.

But Dick was accustomed to sudden surprises, and he very quickly recovered from this one.

He was in a moment alive to the fact that unless he speedily overcame this officer, and that before he gave any alarm, his comrades from below would come to his assistance, and then, in such a place, opposed to such odds, escape would be hopeless.

All this flashed through his mind with the rapidity of lightning.

Feeling, then, the necessity for instantaneous action, he summoned to his aid all the strength which he possessed, and taking a firm grip of his opponent's throat, he endeavoured, by main force, to drag him over the ridge of the roof on to the side on which he was.

Now this officer, full of the hope of being able to capture the redoubtable highwayman single-handed, declined to call for help, as he might have done, and attacked him in a courageous manner.

It was a singular combat.

If there had been a spectator of it, though, he would have noticed that Dick was by slow degrees drawing the officer over in spite of the strenuous efforts which he made to prevent it.

The wound in Dick's arm, which, now that his blood was hot, he thought not of, was, nevertheless, a disadvantage; but this was more than compensated by his superior weight, for the officer, though muscular, was slightly maddened.

Slowly and surely he was being drawn upwards and over.

Neither spoke.

Their heavy breathing was the only sound which issued from them.

With might and main did the officer strive to maintain



TURPIN'S STRUGGLE WITH THE OFFICER ON THE ROOF-TOP.

his position on the slope; but in vain. He made frantic attempts to insert the toes of his boots in the crevices of the tiles and the brickwork of the chimneys; but in vain likewise.

Feeling, then, that it was imperatively necessary to change his tactics, he ceased suddenly to oppose any resistance to being dragged over, and gave himself an impetus forward.

This had the natural effect of causing Dick to lose his balance, and both, without relaxing their hold, rolled over and over down the slanting roof.

Had it not been for the old stone parapet, which was about eighteen inches high, and which had given Dick so much trouble to surmount, they must inevitably have been precipitated into the yard below.

It stopped their further progress, though with more force and suddenness than was pleasant.

A broad gutter, filled with the accumulated mud of many years, surrounded the parapet, and it was into this delightful bed they fell.

Dick was undermost.

The police-officer placed his knee on Dick's breast, and paused a moment to regain his breath; then, in a moment after, the struggle recommenced on both sides with redoubled fury.

They rose to their feet.

There was just room for them to stand in that narrow gutter, but that was all.

Dick was an experienced wrestler, and a cold chill crept over the officer as he felt himself in the grasp of one who was evidently a practised hand.

"Surrender!" said Dick, between his teeth—"Surrender, and I will spare you."

The only reply the officer made was to cling yet tighter to his foe.

"Take your fate, then!" shouted Dick, and he threw him violently down.

The unfortunate officer fell with a dull, sickening sound upon the top of the parapet.

His body was half over, but he still kept his hold. He felt in that was his only chance of preservation.

With a sudden wrench Dick freed himself from it, out at the expense of some portion of his apparel.

With a hideous rush the body of the officer fell back again, and plunged headlong down the abyss ere Dick could put out his hand to save him.

He placed his hands to his ears so that he should shut out the sickening crash of his body falling on the stones below.

He heard it though plainly enough in his imagination, and he withdrew his hands with a horrified expression upon his countenance.

He stooped down and peered over—all was dark below and profoundly still.

"Poor fellow!" said Dick, as he rose; "it's all over with him. I'm sorry, for he was a brave man, but it was his life or mine! Where shall I make my way now?"

He looked all round as he spoke. It was dusk, and the gloom was momentarily increasing.

An apparently solid mass of roofs and chimneys of every imaginable shape and description environed him.

From one or two of the queer-shaped attic-windows came a faint gleam of light.

The moon had not yet risen, or if she had was not sufficiently above the horizon to shed her light upon the roof-tops.

He crawled along the gutters until he came to that part overlooking Drury-lane.

An ever-moving throng filled the pavements, and then in another moment Dick's eye fell upon the form of an officer who was standing in a doorway on the opposite side of the street and regarding the front of the inn attentively.

Dick slunk down still lower in the gutter, though when he peeped over he had not exposed enough of his body to be visible in the darkness.

Along the gutter on to the next house, and then on to the next, until he reached the corner of a street, he slowly crept.

He halted. "I must make my way down by one of these attic windows," he said, "and through the house into the street below."

He made his attempt upon the one nearest to him. It was securely fastened.

Just at that moment his eye fell upon a trap-door in the roof which was slightly displaced from its position.

"That will do it," he said. "All is easy now."

He advanced to the trap as he spoke and lifted it off in a moment. It seemed to cover a square patch of darkness.

Before he trusted himself to descend, he took a coin from his pocket and let it fall through. For aught he knew the trap might be immediately over a steep staircase, or so great a distance from the floor as to prevent his dropping down with safety.

Besides, were anyone about the sound would inevitably attract their attention, but had he shown a light, it would have called notice to him.

The coin fell on a floor a foot or two below him, with a ringing sound.

He listened to see if any notice was taken of it, but all was silent as before.

Then he lowered himself carefully through the trap, holding firmly by his hands. He stretched out his feet and found they just grazed the floor, so he reached it without making the least noise.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK, BY HIS TIMELY PRESENCE, INTERRUPTS THE PERPETRATION OF A DEED OF CRUELTY.—THE YOUNG GIRL'S GRATITUDE.

For a minute or two Dick stood perfectly still, in order that his eyes might become accustomed to the gloom. He dared not exhibit a light, and besides if he did it would only have the effect of making the darkness seem greater by the contrast. For, of course, he could not keep it burning.

Very gradually the light from the aperture in the ceiling above appeared to increase in brightness, and as it did, the objects surrounding him began to be dimly visible.

It was on a small wooden landing which he stood, and

from which one door opened. It was well he had the precaution to stand still, for the top staircase was only a few inches from him.

He extended his hand and rested it upon the baluster. It was large and massive, and such as may be found in London in old houses, at the present time.

With slow and careful steps, and walking close to the wall so as to make the least possible noise, Dick descended the flight of stairs, and found himself upon another landing.

He could see with tolerable ease about him, for it was lighted with a long window.

Hearing no sound, and seeing nothing indicative of the presence of a living creature, Dick did not pause, but commenced the descent of the second flight.

His foot was on the sixth step from the top, and he was feeling his way round the turn in the staircase, when his ears were saluted with a succession of short shrieks of so shrill a nature that he almost lost his balance.

It was evidently from a female that they proceeded.

"Good heavens!" said Dick, "whatever can have happened. I never heard such frightful screams before. Some poor girl is in trouble, I take it!"

As he uttered these words, he sprang hastily down the remainder of the stairs, nor did he pause until he found himself in the passage close to the front door.

The horrible shrieks still sounded in his ears, but they came from some depth lower down.

Guided by the cries, he found his way to the head of the stairs leading to the kitchen, and up these they came in full force.

Without a moment's delay or hesitation, Dick ran down them, and seeing a bright light issuing from a partially closed door, he pushed it open, and with the hanger, which he wore by his side, in his grasp, burst into the apartment.

A horrifying sight met his gaze.

Cowering on the floor, and divested of almost every article of attire, was a young girl of about seventeen years of age. She was dark, and had long glossy hair hanging disorderedly about her. Her hands were clasped together tightly, and her face, under happier auspices, was doubtless beautiful, but now it was convulsed with agony. Her lips were apart and bloodless, and tears were streaming from her eyes.

Standing over her, and flourishing a broad, heavy belt or strap, was a being in the shape of a woman. She was old and gaunt, presenting indeed more the appearance of an animated skeleton than aught else. Her eyes were bright and reptile-looking, and a ghastly expression of delight and fiend-like malice lighted up her countenance as she struck the girl brutally with the strap.

Close by was a short, thin, insignificant-looking man, but there was a world of pity and commiseration in his looks. He held up his hands in a deprecating manner, as though he would fain, if he had the power, interpose and shield the young girl from the violent attack the woman made upon her.

Dick saw all this at a glance.

"Help! help! Save me! save me!" shrieked the young girl, as her eyes fell upon the new-comer. "Oh! sir, whoever you may be, save and help me!"

She sprang up on her feet, and reaching Dick's side with a bound, flung her arms round him and clung with the intensity of one who feels she has found a saviour.

Unmitigated surprise at the sudden appearance of a man in so hostile an attitude, deprived the old hag for an instant of both speech and motion, and she glared upon Dick as she held the strap in the air, as though she had been suddenly confronted with a spectre.

Dick passed his arm round the slight form of the young girl and drew her towards him, endeavouring by this means to reassure her and calm her terrible agitation.

"Oh! save me, sir! save me!" she sobbed, "take me away from here! Pray do, for Mrs. Brettle beats me nearly to death every day. Oh! do take me away! Will you, sir?"

She clung to him still more closely, as she asked this question, and looked up into his face with so much appealing earnestness, that Dick felt the tears spring uncontrollably into his eyes.

"Save you, my poor girl!" he said, in his deep, manly tones, which thrilled through every nerve of the girl's body with a feeling of exquisite delight which she had

never before experienced; "of course I will, and take you where you please, but not till I have punished this hag for her cruelty towards you."

A happy smile lighted up her face like a sunbeam when she heard his promise, but it was suddenly clouded over, and a look of deep dejection usurped its place.

"Why do you look so sad all at once?" asked Dick. "I'll let you know, Mr. What's-your-name!" burst in the shrill tones of the old woman's voice at this moment, and before the girl could frame a reply, "I'll let you know, Mr. What's-your-name, whether you can come rampaging into a lone woman's house in this way, and interfering between her and her apprentice as belongs to her, leastways as she took out of the work-house at St. Giles's two weeks ago come Easter Monday. I'll let you know."

"Apprentice?" said Dick. "Yes, apprentice!" repeated the old woman. "I should like to know whether there's a law in the land, or whether there isn't; and if a lone woman is to have her house broken into because she chooses to give her parish apprentice a lesson. That's what I want to know."

As for the miserable-looking man, he said never a word, but stood looking from one to another aghast.

Disdaining to say anything further to this woman, who, now that she had recovered the use of her tongue, would doubtless be terribly abusive, Dick bent down his head, and looking into the girl's face with an air of perfect ease and confidence, said—

"Is it true, my dear, what this—woman, I suppose, I must call her—says? Are you her apprentice?"

"Alas! sir; yes."

"What is she? I mean, what trade were you apprenticed to learn?"

"Cap-making, sir."

"And—forgive me if what I ask hurts your feelings—from what has been said I gather you are alone in the world?"

"Quite—quite alone, sir!" said the girl, sobbing and weeping afresh. "I have no father, no mother, nor have I friend in the world."

"Oh! yes, you have," replied Dick, cheerfully. "Providence has sent me here just in time to be a friend in need to you, and I will take care you are no longer subjected to her brutality."

He pointed with his finger towards the woman whom the girl had called Mrs. Brettel.

"Oh! indeed; oh! indeed, Mr. What-d'ye-call. How much longer are you going on with your mighty-tighty nonsense? I know what's law if you don't. That's my apprentice, and if you don't give her up at once, and leave my house, I will send for a constable, and pretty soon make you. Things have come to a pretty pass, indeed, when you can't do as you like in your own house without some bully or —"

"Silence, hag!" shouted Dick. "Were it not for your sex I would bestow such a summary chastisement upon you as should serve for a lesson for the rest of your life. There are too many like you, who fancy when you take a poor orphan apprentice into your clutches you can commit what outrage you choose upon her. Why does she beat you?" asked Dick, in kinder tones, as he turned again to the young girl.

A vivid flush of crimson in a moment overspread her face.

"Do not ask me that, sir; do not ask me that," she replied, bending her eyes downwards. "Indeed I can't tell you. It is something very wrong."

Dick's eyes blazed ominously as he heard this answer, and when the old woman again saw his countenance, it wore as terrible an expression that she involuntarily fell upon her knees and yelled for mercy.

The girl sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Cheer up!" said Dick, "cheer up. You have nothing to be ashamed of, and I will take care you are no longer coerced by her in any way. But who is that man?" he added, indicating the man who was present.

"That, sir, is Mr. Brettel."

"Her husband?"

"Yes."

"And does he sanction such cruelty?"

"Oh! no sir. He is kindness and gentleness itself. He would not hurt a fly, but his wife treats him almost as badly as she does me, and he is quite powerless to

help me, and if he even said a word of remonstrance she would beat him almost to death with the strap."

Dick regarded Mr. Brettel with a look in which surprise, curiosity, and pity were strangely blended.

"Is it possible?" he said. "It is true, sir; and I have to thank him for many little kindnesses which he has done me."

"You have, have you?" screamed the wife, rising suddenly from her abject position. "So that's how you set me at defiance in my own house, you tyrant, is it?" she continued, addressing her husband. "Take that and that!"

As these last words issued from her lips she rushed upon him like some wild animal, and struck him over the head and face with the strap.

"She's a delightful female, certainly," said Dick, as he released himself from the hold of the young girl; "but I must put a stop to this."

Suiting the action to the word, he seized the furious woman by the neck, and, brandishing his hanger in her face, compelled her to desist.

Mr. Brettel rose with difficulty to his feet, and wiped the blood from his neck and face.

"Now, sir," said Dick, as his eye fell upon a clothes-line that was stretched across the room, "I will render you a service. Pull that rope down, and give it to me."

Mr. Brettel tremblingly obeyed.

"On second thoughts," said Turpin, as he handed it back to him, "you shall bind her yourself."

"I—I!" said the husband, with genuine terror in his tones.

"Yes, you," said Dick, laughing. "You needn't look so frightened about it. You will have no danger. If she makes the least resistance, I will have her head off at a single blow."

He flourished his weapon in a formidable manner.

Mr. Brettel's hands shook so much that no one would have fancied for a moment that he would be able to do such an act; but after awhile his wife's apathy endowed him with courage, and he bound her strongly.

Dick sheathed his hanger.

"That's over; and now, Mr. Brettel, if you'll take a piece of friendly advice, you will keep her just as she is until she's half dead with hunger. She will be submissive enough then. Never heed her threats. So long as you do not unloose her she can do nothing. It will be your own fault if she ever ill-treats you again."

Mrs. Brettel ground her teeth with rage.

Her husband ventured to smile, and rubbed his hands over one another with feeble satisfaction.

"I will do it!" he said; "I will do it!"

"Well done!" said Dick, patting him encouragingly on the back. "Well done! I shouldn't advise you—Hullo!"

"What's the matter?"

"Why, where's the young girl gone?"

"Who, Ellen?"

"If that is her name."

"I am here!" said a gentle voice, and the apprentice entered the room, but so altered that Dick scarcely recognised her.

She had taken the opportunity to slip out while they were so busily engaged in binding her mistress, and had put on a bonnet and a shawl.

She walked quickly towards Dick, and placed her hand in his.

"Take me with you, sir!" she said, pleadingly. "Do take me away from here! I don't care where I go, so that I leave this hateful place! You are brave and gentle, and I feel that I can trust you. I have no one else that I can ask to assist me. Will you take me?"

Dick hesitated.

He was in a rather dangerous situation, and might have some difficulty in getting his mare and leaving London were he by himself, but encumbered by this girl his hopes of escape were diminished tenfold.

Then, besides, he asked himself if he did escape with her, what was he to do with her eventually.

The girl noticed his hesitation.

She withdrew her hand, and her eyes ranged with tears.

"Don't think wrongly of me for asking you," she said. "I did not mean to offend you; only I thought you would be able to—"

Tears and sobs checked her utterance.

"My dear girl," said he, drawing her towards him, "I wish I could take you away from here, and I will, too. But I shall only involve you in fresh perils, and perhaps worse ones than those from which I have rescued you."

"No, no; that cannot be!"

"The curse of Cain is on me! My hand is against every man's, and every man's is against mine!"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"I am amenable to the laws—I am a felon! Even at this moment the officers are no doubt on my track. You are innocent, but I am guilty!"

"I will not believe it," said Ellen, dashing the tears from her eyes. "You are all that is good, all that is noble!"

There was evident admiration in her gaze.

"My dear girl," said Dick, again drawing her towards him, for he felt that this young girl's trusting confidence had kindled a warm feeling in his heart.

"I would take you with me, you do not know how gladly, only I know so well I shall but involve you in fresh difficulties and dangers."

"I shall not fear them if you are by, because I have seen that you are bold and strong enough to overcome them all. Do let me share your perils. I would dare everything to be taken away from here!"

"But if you go I can fetch you back again. Thank goodness! there is law for that!" screamed Mrs. Brettel, who had all this time been tugging at her bonds in a vain effort to free herself. "I tell you, you are mine—mine, and the law will bring you back!"

The accents of her voice, although she was powerless to do her harm, filled the apprentice with renewed terror, and she again clung to Dick's arm.

"Don't be frightened, my dear," said he. "I see I shall never be able to leave you here exposed to her tender mercies. I will take you where you will be in safety, and where she will never find you, or perish in the attempt," he added, mentally.

Ellen gave quite a scream of pleasure as these words fell upon her ear.

"Come, come, you must learn not to be so excitable as you are. There, put your arm in mine, and we will be off."

How gladly the poor apprentice complied with his words!

She looked up in his face with the same trusting smile which he had twice before seen upon her countenance, and which became her so well.

As he gazed upon her, the bold highwayman forgot all about his present dangerous position, and pressing her hand to his side, left the kitchen.

A volley of abuse from Mrs. Brettel followed him.

"I say, Mr. B.," said Dick, returning, and popping his head in at the door. "Do not you forget my advice. Treat her like they do a wild animal! Tame her with hunger. It will be all your own fault if ever she ill-treats you again. Good-bye, old fellow!"

He shut the door as he spoke.

"Now, my dear," said Dick to the young girl who had been so strangely thrown upon his protection, "as the place is so confoundedly dark, perhaps you wouldn't mind showing me the way to the upper regions?"

Ellen laughed lightly as she held his hand, and led him up the staircase into the passage above. The poor orphan was happier than she had been for many a year. Her past sufferings were already forgotten.

"Here we are," she said, pausing at the front door.

There was a faint light over the top, and through this an oil lamp shed a feeble light. It fell upon Ellen's face, and tinged it with a rare beauty. Dick sighed, and thought he had never seen anything so lovely.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK FINDS A PLACE OF REFUGE FOR THE POOR ORPHAN APPRENTICE.

"STOP!" said Dick, as the young girl put her hand on the lock of the front door preparatory to opening it.

"What for?"

"Why, although you said you did not believe it, it is nevertheless true that I have seriously transgressed the laws, and it was to elude the pursuit of the officers, who were after me, that I dropped through the door in your

roof, intending to make my way out at the front door. But I heard your screams, and I forgot all about myself in remembering that a female was in trouble."

"And so," said Ellen, in a grave voice, "you have perhaps, by saving me, given your enemies an opportunity of ascertaining your whereabouts, and time to take fresh measures for your capture."

"I hope not; but I fear so."

"Oh! I understand now why you said you could not take me with you. I should be an encumbrance to you, and you would have to look after me when you ought to be looking after yourself. I did not know of this, indeed I did not, or I would never have been so selfish as to ask you to take me away with you. Farewell! I will remain, and leave you at least the prospect of making your escape."

She held out her hand, and repeated the word "Farewell!"

"How you run on to be sure. Of course I am all that you say, and a great deal more, perhaps. But I am quite resolved now to take you with me and chance the danger. It is probable enough the officers are thrown quite off the scent, and have relinquished pursuit of me. If so, we shall get off without any trouble."

Ellen shook her head.

"No—no," she said, "I cannot be so ungenerous. Fly, fly at once, and leave me to make my own escape."

"And where are you going to, my poor girl? Do not think of that, but render me a service."

"Render you a service? Oh! what can I do? Tell me, tell me."

"Well, you understand, of course, that these enemies of mine are police-officers?"

"Yes—yes."

"Do you know one when you see him?"

"To be sure; because of their large red waistcoats."

"Just so. It is very possible some of them may be waiting outside the door here to pounce upon me as soon as I get into the street."

"What can I do?"

"Why, I want you to open the front door, and go out as if upon some ordinary business, leaving me here in the passage."

"Yes—yes."

"Well, when you are out, go a little way up Drury-lane, looking carefully all about you, yet not seeming to do so, and come back and tell me whether you see any lurking about."

"Yes. I shall not be long."

"Be cautious, Ellen. If you see no one, then I can regain my mare, which is close by, and take you to a place of safety."

The young girl took his hand again, and, pressing it affectionately, opened the door and went out.

Dick stood quite still in the passage, patiently awaiting her return.

He took a couple of pistols from his coat-pocket and examined the priming, so that they might be in readiness for immediate use.

A hum of voices came up from the kitchen where he had left Mr. and Mrs. Brettel. The couple were, no doubt, in high disputation.

Several minutes passed, but Ellen did not return.

Dick began to be uneasy.

He took a watch from his pocket, and, holding it close to the faint light, looked at the time. It was close upon twelve.

His impatience rose to an unbearable extent. He did not for a moment think the girl had played him false, but dreaded she had fallen into some fresh trouble.

He was just about to open the door, and sally out for confirmation or dispersion of his fears, when some one tapped lightly at it.

He flung the door open in a moment.

It was Ellen.

"Did you not think me a long time?" she asked. "I thought you would, but I have been all round and cannot see an officer anywhere."

"That is well. Then we may get off in perfect safety. We will not delay another moment."

Dick, as he spoke, passed out of the house with his companion, and closed the door after him.

All was still in the street, or rather court, into which he emerged.

A dozen or so steps brought them into Drury-lane. Most of the shops were shut, but here and there an open one cast a beam of light on the pavement.

The miserable oil lamps that were stuck here and there flickered feebly, and so-called "dianal" the darkness for a foot around them.

"I think," said Dick, "you had better go in at the front door of the 'White Horse,' while I go round into the court by the stables. Walk straight up to the bar, and ask for Matthew Gale, the landlord, and then tell him I am round the corner waiting for the mare."

With the alacrity of genuine gratitude, the young girl did his bidding.

The old inn was full of rude, noisy people, and she shrank back a little. For herself, she would never have dared to enter, but, for her preserver, she felt she could do anything, so she walked up to the bar and asked for Matthew Gale.

"That's me, miss," said the person she addressed, leaning over the window-sill, "what do you want?"

A man was standing at the bar window drinking a glass of gin, and the hasty glance which Ellen flung upon him did not prepossess her in his favour.

"I want to speak to you, sir, if you please. I have a message to deliver."

The man with the gin assumed an indifferent air, and raised his glass to his lips; but his sense of hearing the while was stretched to its fullest extent.

"Come in; come in here," said Matthew Gale, in those jovial tones which were really a pleasure to hear, and opening the half-glass door that led into the bar. "Come in here, and tell me what you have to say."

"It is a secret," she said, in a whisper. "A friend of yours who has his mare here is waiting for it in the court, and wants you to bring it out to him."

Old Matthew looked at her distrustfully for a moment, but her ingenuous countenance bore upon it no traces of treachery or deceit.

"Very well," he said, in a whisper. "Go back and tell him his mare will be ready in a moment."

"Thank you, sir."

She rose from her seat and left the bar, and as she passed the man at the window, she saw him empty his glass, and after saying a word or two to the landlord, follow her to the front door.

Her position was rather embarrassing.

The man might be, and probably was, a police officer whose suspicions were aroused and who had determined to follow her.

She knew not how to act. If she hesitated she would convert the man's suspicions into certainties.

A confectioner's shop was just on the opposite side of the way, and the idea for a moment crossed her brain that she would go in there and make some trifling purchase, when she recollected with a pang that she had no money.

What was to be done?

She availed herself of the only resource that was open to her, and she turned back and went again to the bar-window.

Old Matthew had vanished.

She looked up the passage. The man had evidently gone into the street, but whether he had turned to the left or the right of course she could form no sort of conjecture.

Time was speeding on. The mare was doubtless ready, and her preserver anxiously waiting for her to make her appearance; and every minute he stayed she knew to be full of danger to him.

Without saying a word to a soul, she made her way again to the door.

A tipsy woman on the other side of the way, and who was endeavouring to keep on her feet by clutching the window-shutters, was the only person in sight.

She darted round the corner of the court in a moment.

"Ellen! Ellen!" she heard a voice say, in suppressed tones.

"I am here," she said, hastening forward.

At the corner of Stanhope-street was a man on horse-back.

She recognised her preserver instantly.

"You must mount and ride before me," said Dick, as she reached his side. "I have no other means of conveying you."

She held out her hands to him, and he swung her into the saddle before him.

Just at that moment a shrill whistle sounded through the court, and the man whom Ellen had seen drinking at the bar sprang out of the shadow of a gateway and grasped Bess by the bridle.

It was no time for compunctious hesitation, for Dick knew that the signal he had given would quickly bring others to the spot; so, seizing one of the holster-pistols by the barrel, he struck the man a terrible blow on the head.

Down he went like a shot.

"Off and away!" said Dick, giving his mare the rein, "on Bess, on!"

With a loud shout, a desultory throng of persons came rushing down the court from the direction of Drury-lane.

"Stop him! stop him!" they cried, "A thousand pounds reward! Stop him! stop him! Dick Turpin the highwayman! A thousand pounds reward!"

A cry of terror came from Ellen's lips as she heard the sounds, and she clung yet tighter to him.

"All right, my girl," said Dick, "they are on foot. We shall soon be safe. Don't be frightened."

Bess went round the corner of Duke-street, and into Lincoln's Inn-fields with a rush, and then the loud report of several pistols rose upon the air.

"Are you hurt, Ellen?" said Dick.

"No, no; I am quite safe and unhurt. And you?"

"Without a scratch."

The young girl gave a sigh of relief.

"The danger is over now," said Dick, as he trotted quietly across Holborn, and saw no signs of his pursuers. "Your troubles will be over now, I hope. I have just recollected an old friend of mine who keeps an inn near Hornsey-wood, and who will, I know, only be too happy to find a shelter for a friend of mine."

"Oh! thanks, thanks," said the girl. "How shall I be able to repay you for all that you have done to-night on my behalf?"

"Why, forget all about it, and never mention the subject. You will be wise if you banish all thoughts of Mrs. Brettel and her cruelties from your recollection."

The poor girl shuddered.

"I will try to do so," she said, "but I feel I shall never be able to be sufficiently grateful to you."

"Pho! pho! nonsense! say no more on that subject, I beg you; let us talk about something else. Look there is a nice level piece of road before us. I will show you what speed bonny Black Bess can make!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ARRIVAL AT THE "HAND AND KEYS," NEAR HORNSEY WOOD.—THE MURDER.

"And are you really," said the orphan apprentice, as Dick, after a hard gallop, slackened speed a little, while traversing a narrow lane, "are you really that brave, true heart whose name is in every one's mouth, and to whom such generous actions are ascribed?"

"Well, I don't know about that," replied Dick, with a smile; "but I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman, whose delight is to cry, 'Stand and deliver!' to a passenger on the road; and this is Black Bess, without whom he would be nothing, if that's what you mean."

"You underrate yourself, as generous natures always do. I have heard so much of you, and so longed to see you, but I never thought I should meet with you. I am so happy."

Turpin whistled.

"I wish you would change the subject," he said. "I never feel comfortable when anyone praises me, because I know very well I don't deserve it."

"You do; you do indeed."

"I am afraid you are prepossessed in my favour. If you will believe me, it would require a vast amount of good to counterbalance the evil which I do. I would rather talk about something else, or, if you like, we will take another gallop."

"I am willing."

Once more, after this brief dialogue, the trees and hedges seemed to fly past them, as Bess put forth her marvellous speed, and very soon the old inn known as the "Hand and Keys" was in sight.

"That," said Turpin, as he pointed it out to his companion, "is the place I intend you to take shelter in, until some further arrangements can be made for your future course of life."

It was a very large, old-fashioned building. The walls were of wood, and the immense roof, though tiled in places, was for the most part, thatched. It stood some few yards back from the road, having a spacious yard in front, which was used in summer as a bowling-green.

Somewhat to Turpin's surprise—for it was past one o'clock, and the inn was noted for closing early—lights were shining from almost all the latticed casements, and when he halted close to the horse-trough he could plainly hear the strains of some musical instruments, and the sound of jollity and merry-making within.

"Whatever can be the occasion of this?" he asked himself. "I am quite sure it must be something extraordinary to keep Tom Davis and his wife up so late. Hi! Jabes, Jabes!"

It was the ostler he came, and who rejoiced in the name of Jabes, but, contrary to an hitherto unvarying custom, no Jabes made his appearance.

After waiting a moment Dick sprang off his mare, and assisted Ellen to alight.

"I suppose he is too busy indoors to pay any attention to us to-night; so come, I am sure you must be tired, and we will make our way in at once. We may think ourselves very lucky in having found them up. I should think such a thing never happened before."

They reached the front door of the inn, which was closed, and Turpin tapped at it in a peculiar manner.

It was opened in a moment by the stoutest man that Ellen had ever in her life beheld.

"Well, Tom, my boy, how are you? What, in the name of goodness, is in the wind, that you are all up at this hour?"

"Bless my stars!" ejaculated the landlord, "if it ain't Dick. Here, walk in—walk in. I didn't think I should have the pleasure of seeing you to-night. I am more pleased than if anybody had given me a hundred pounds."

"Whatever for, Davis?"

"Why, you see, it's just a hundred years ago this very night since the old place was built. A century, mind you. So I have invited everybody that I could think of, intending to make a glorious night of it. Now, I would sooner have you than anyone else, provided," he added, in a more serious tone, "you have not been up to your tricks in the neighbourhood, because, if you have, I should advise you to be off."

"Oh! that's all right enough. Don't let that trouble you a bit! I haven't been near here for months. But, I say, first of all, how about my mare? Where's Jabes?"

"Oh! he's indoors, and half-drunk by this time, I'll warrant. Never mind. I'll stable the mare myself."

"All right. I'll go too."

"Yes—yes. You always do that. But, I say Dick?"

"What?"

"Who's that you've got standing behind you? It's a petticoat. Oh! Dick, you're as bad as a soldier!"

The landlord chuckled gleefully at what he was pleased to consider his own wit.

"Hold your row, fatsides, and let's stable the mare. I do not want to stand on the doorstep talking all night. Make haste. I have something particular I want to say to you."

"All right—all right. Here, come along. You know the way. You had better lead Bess yourself."

The little party crossed the yard, and made their way round to the back of the inn, where Bess was carefully fed and lodged.

"Now, Dick," said Tom Davis, the landlord, as they stood in the stable, "if you've got anything private you want to say to me, why you can't find a better place or a better opportunity than the present."

"No, I was about to say the same thing."

"Well, then, let's hear it; because the sooner I get back into the room again along with the company the better!"

"Just so, and I will out what I have to say as short as possible. I met with a very singular series of adventures last night, and was wounded in the shoulder. I sought refuge at Matthew Gae's crib in White Horse-yard, Drury Lane. You know old Matthew?"

"Of course I do! Who doesn't?—Cut along!"

"He found me and my mare snug quarters, and I had a comfortable nap for about twelve hours, when old Matthew woke me up and told me the grabs were down stairs. I had stolen the golden cup from the ex-lord mayor, as he was on his way home, and he made, I suppose, a grand fuss about it, so the officers were searching everywhere for me."

"But what in the world make you take such a thing as that? Why, it's no good to you, and would, of course, bring you into trouble!"

"Well, I should never have done it for the sake of the cup itself, only I ought to have told you I made a bet of fifty pounds that I would take it, and produce it within three nights, which will be to-morrow night, so I must get back again to London."

"And have you the cup with you?"

"Yes."

"I should uncommonly like to see it. Here, hold it up while I hold the lantern."

"All serene," said Turpin, complying with his request.

"Very pretty; very pretty, indeed. I should think the old bloke is savage."

"No doubt he is."

"Did you have much trouble to get it?"

"Scarcely any; but just before I got away up came a body of officers. Some one must have split on the job, and set them on the watch. However, I got off all right."

"I should not like to be the cove that did it!"

"You may depend if I find him out I will make him suffer for it."

"Serve him right!"

"However, I'm not telling you what I intended. It's this. The Redbreasts, as I said just now, were after me; so, by old Matthew's advice, I got out of the window of the room I was in, and on to the roof."

"And then got off, I suppose?"

"No, not altogether. They had stationed one of their men on the roof to see that I did not escape that way, and he pounced upon me. We had a desperate struggle, in which he fell over the parapet, and into the yard fifty feet below!"

"God bless me!"

"I felt sorry for him. He was a brave fellow!"

"Well, what happened next?"

"I crawled over the roofs till I came to the corner of Clare-court, and then I got into one of the houses through a trap-door in the tiles."

"Go on—go on!"

"I was halfway down the second flight when I heard such a sudden succession of shrill screams that I was almost stunned. I rushed down stairs like a shot."

"I suppose you forgot all about the officers?"

"Quite. When I got to the kitchen-door, I did not hesitate; but still hearing the terrible screams, dashed the door open, and sprang into the room!"

"What next?"

"There, on the floor, I saw this poor girl, who is an apprentice, and her barbarous mistress was standing over her, and flogging her with a strap!"

"A strap! Now, d—"

"Now, don't be rash, Tom, and hear me out to the end," interrupted Turpin, seizing the landlord's hand, which he had clenched as if about to inflict condign chastisement on some one. "Don't be rash!"

"Very well. Go on, then; but if that wouldn't make a man's blood boil, I don't know what would!"

"Nor I."

"And you saved her, Dick?"

"I did. She was a poor orphan, without a single friend to fly to for protection."

"Then God bless you for such a good deed!"

"And this," said Dick, as he took Ellen by the hand, and led her a step or two forward, "this is the beautiful girl who was the victim of so much cruelty."

"No!"

"She is, though; and now, Tom Davis, this is what I want to say to you. No one knows my way of life better than you do, and how impossible it would be for me to take charge of this poor girl. Now you, Tom, have neither chick nor child, as the saying is; so I want you to find a home for her for a little while, until arrangements can be made for getting her employment and deciding what her future shall be."

"That wants no deciding," said the warm-hearted landlord, with a tear in his eye, "leastways, if she's willing to accept what I propose. Now, my dear," he said, turning to Ellen, "do you think you could make yourself happy and contented at the old 'Hand and Keys' along with me? If you do, why all I can say is, there's a home for you as long as you like to have it, and I'll be your father. Do you consent? If you do, I shall be happy indeed, for your sweet face, and the troubles you have gone through, have quite won my heart."

The tears thronged so thickly into Ellen's eyes as the landlord made this generous offer with so much tenderness and kindness that she could not say a word in reply, but, leaving Turpin's side, where she had stood during the brief dialogue, placed her arms around his neck, and kissed his cheek.

"There, there, don't take on like that, don't take on like that," said Tom Davis, his own voice husky with emotion. "The idea of anyone, now—Turpin, I tell you plain, I can't believe it."

"Can't believe what?"

"Why, that there ever could be anyone barbarous enough to harm a poor, loving, beautiful child like this is. It's altogether impossible, and quite against human nature!"

"One would think so," said Turpin; "but I am sorry, for the sake of that same human nature," to say there are plenty of people who are more cruel than wild beasts."

"So it seems, so it seems."

"But, Davis, when I had saved this young girl, I was fairly puzzled to know what to do with her."

"You were?"

"Yes, until, all at once, I thought of you, and then I felt sure that I had found this poor girl a refuge."

"And so you had. Now, my dear," said Davis, "are you willing to stay with me? because, if you are, we will get back to the house at once."

"Oh! sir, how can you ask me such a thing? You must not think me foolish, but I have for so long heard nothing but unkind words that your kind ones make me weep in spite of myself."

She laid her hand again upon his shoulder. She already felt for him the affection a daughter feels for a father.

"Now may—" began Davis, again, and no doubt, in the height of his indignation, he was going to pronounce some terrible anathema, but Turpin stayed him.

"Come," he said, "I think we understand each other now, so the best thing we can do is to get under the roof-tree of the old inn. Poor Ellen, here, after all she has gone through, must, I am sure, be wearied to death. As for myself, I feel I require no rest at present, I had such a long, sound sleep at Matthew's; so, while you find her a bed-chamber, I will, if you are willing, join the company in the kitchen. There is no one there who knows me, is there, Tom?"

"No one that I am aware of. Bess is all safe until you want her, so we will go in at once. They will wonder what has become of us. Take hold of my arm, my dear, and I hope now I have got charge of you, you have seen all your troubles."

So saying, the trio made their way back to the inn, and entered it by the back door. The landlord's wife was called, and Ellen's story related to her. Her disposition was as open-hearted as her husband's, and, as they were childless, she received the orphan with delight.

After a few minutes' more conversation Ellen, bidding her preserver and protector an affectionate good night, left the room in company with buxom Mrs. Davis.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXTRAORDINARY SEQUEL TO THE MURDER AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN

"I say, Davis!" said Turpin, as he looked down at his attire, which was most certainly none the better for the many incidents he had gone through; "I say, Davis, my boy, it is quite impossible for me to go into company in this plight. Suspicion would be immediately excited. What shall I do?"

"Why, change your dress, to be sure. Here, come up stairs along with me, and I can show you a well-stocked wardrobe, from which you can select at pleasure."

"That's the ticket. I sha'n't be long, for I am anxious to join the fun that's going on."

And Turpin was as good as his word, for in a few moments he came down again, presenting a very different appearance indeed to what he did before.

There were two large rooms on the ground-floor of the "Hand and Keys;" both of these were filled with company. In the one, young folks for the most part assembled, who amused themselves with the dance; while in the other a good number of guests were seated round the enormous fire, which reached half up the chimney, telling tales, jokes, and remarkable adventures.

It was into this latter room that Turpin went. He was hardly in a humour for dancing.

His appearance attracted immediate attention; for his manners, carriage, and attire were those of a most refined gentleman.

He bowed low to the assembled company as he entered, and old Davis, the landlord, as soon as he saw him, sprang from his seat with a degree of alacrity very unusual for him to exhibit, and, seizing his hand, said—

"Friends and neighbours all, I have the pleasure to introduce you to a very old and particular friend of mine, Mr. —a—a—"

"Richards," said Turpin, seeing the landlord was rather at a loss what name to call him by. "I am very happy to see you all, gentlemen, and hope we shall very soon be better acquainted!"

He took a seat in the chimney-corner, which was offered him by the landlord, as he spoke.

"Fill up another bumper!" cried Davis. "Don't spare, but drink to the prosperity of the 'Hand and Keys,' which is a hundred years old to-night!"

All rose, and the toast was, for about the twentieth time, drank with loud applause.

"I say, Davis!" cried a tall, thin man, as he resumed his chair in the front of the fire, "I have only just this moment remembered that to-night is also the anniversary of another event connected with the old inn. It is the eighth, I think!"

"God bless me, so it is!" said Davis, with a slight shudder. "I did not think of it before; but just eight years ago to-night a most horrible murder was committed upstairs!"

"In this house?"

"Yes, in No. 3, on the first-floor."

"I never heard anything about it before, landlord," said Turpin, as he poked the fire, and made the bright flame shoot up four feet at least. "How did it happen?"

"It was a very sad affair, neighbour Groves, wasn't it?" said Davis.

"It were; it were, indeed!"

"Let us hear it, Davis; let us hear it!" cried several voices, animated by that love of the horrible which seems an almost natural instinct. "Let's hear it!"

They drew nearer the fire as they spoke.

"Well, gentlemen," said Davis, settling himself in his chair, and pulling three or four tremendous whiffs from his pipe, "I shall be most happy to oblige you, of course, though I can't help thinking it is rather out of place to-night, when we met to be jolly."

"No—no!" cried a number of voices. "Go on!"

"All right. I dare say most of you here know something of the occurrence."

"Very little."

"Then, perhaps," said Davis, inquiringly, "it will be best for me to begin at the beginning, and tell the tale all through?"

"Of course—of course. Now don't keep us in suspense any longer."

"I won't. You must know, then, it is just eight years ago to-night, and as one or two were sitting round the fire here, as we might be now, telling tales and talking about the old house which had defied the wind and weather for so long—it was almost as late as it is now—when we were every one startled—"

"Yes—yes; make haste!" they cried, impatiently.

"Now, gentlemen, if you interrupt or bother me, I sha'n't be able to get on at all, and it won't take very long. As I was saying, it was almost as late as it is now, when we were all startled by hearing a tremendous knock at the door.

"I didn't know how it was, but just then we all happened to have left off speaking when this very loud sus-

session of knocks were given at the front door. There was something very peculiar about them, and I never could make out what they were done with. I have never heard any knocks like them either before or since; and—bless my heart alive! what's that?"

A rapid succession of blows upon the door, of a very peculiar nature indeed, reverberated through the old building, and caused the landlord to utter his involuntary exclamation.

"It's some one knocking!" said the thin man in front of the fire, "and knocking, too, just like—"

A repetition of the summons at the door drowned the rest of his speech.

Turpin rose to his feet.

"You really don't mean to say you are all so alarmed at such a simple circumstance? Run, some one, and open the door."

Nobody stirred.

Then, for the third time, came the terrific knocking at the door.

Now the prominent idea in Dick's mind was that this noisy summons was given by some body of police, who, likely enough, had tracked him to his present shelter, so, of course, he naturally hesitated to open the door himself.

Then he remembered the change he had made in his dress, and thought that the likeliest means of averting suspicion from himself was to go in person to the door, and see who was there.

No sooner had he made this resolve than he opened the door of the kitchen, and passed out into the passage beyond.

Before, however, he could reach the front door, it was flung open, and a tall man wearing a roquelaure cloak strode in.

The occupants of both rooms in the inn had rushed in a body to the doors, and stood still, gazing at the stranger.

"Well! what now? what now?" said the new comer, with a strange mixture of assurance and nervous agitation; "what kind of place do you call this? Are you all mad, or did you never have a visitor before?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Tom Davis, forcing his way into the passage, and making a bow to the traveller, "I am very sorry we kept you waiting, but you happened to arrive at a very curious time."

"I don't see that. It is not as though you were all a-bed. However, it ain't worth making a bother about."

"Thank you, sir; thank you. Be kind enough to step into the kitchen, and we will make you as comfortable as we can. You see the old inn has been built just a hundred years to-day, and we are celebrating the event."

"Oh! indeed, landlord!" said the stranger, seating himself in the chair which had been placed for him, and looking around at the time-blackened walls with an uninterested air; "I suppose you were all too much occupied to hear me, and yet I thought I knocked loud enough too."

"It wasn't that," said Davis. "We heard you plain enough; but, as I said before, you happened to arrive at a very curious time."

"How? What time?"

"Why, just before you arrived, neighbour Groves happened to remember that it was exactly eight years ago to-night that a shocking murder was committed in No. 3 bedroom upstairs!"

The stranger gave a sudden start, and paled slightly.

"What place is this, then?"

"Why, the old 'Hand and Keys,' to be sure!"

"The 'Hand and Keys!'" repeated the stranger, in a trembling voice. "It is very cold," he added, drawing his cloak still closer round him, and almost burying his face in its folds, "I quite shiver with it!"

"You don't say so, sir! Here, Jabes! Jabes!"

"Here you are! what do you want?" said a surly voice; and the ostler, whom the knocking and the recent arrival had aroused from his slumber, got slowly off his seat.

"Some more wood on the fire, Jabes. Quick now, the gentleman is cold!"

"Oh! never mind, never mind. Don't trouble, don't trouble," said the traveller, who had a strange way of repeating his words. "I shall do, I shall do!"

Nevertheless, Jabes took his departure, and quickly

returned with three or four chumps, which he threw on the fire.

By this time the guests, who had been aroused by the knocking, following so close on to Farmer Groves's narrative, had sat down in their respective places, one and all bestowing the whole of their attention on the man who had just arrived.

A rather embarrassing silence followed, which the landlord broke by saying—

"Have you travelled far, sir?"

"Yes—yes; a long way—a long way," replied the stranger. "I suppose I can have a bed here?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then get it ready at once!"

"Should you like a fire lighted, sir?"

"By all means."

"Very good, sir."

"And while you are doing that, just bring me a glass of brandy—a tumbler, you understand; and let it be strong—strong!"

Old Davis executed his orders; and when the large quantity of raw spirit was placed before the stranger, he drank half of it off at one gulp.

Then again followed a pause, which every moment seemed to grow more and more intolerable. It was remarkable that those who had been talking so freely just before should now be at a loss what to say. There was something about this stranger which attracted the whole of their attention.

Turpin had taken care to seat himself in the shadow on one side of the grate, and he leaned back against the wall almost shrouded from observation. A continuity of perilous adventures made him suspicious of the slightest circumstance that had anything unusual in it. The dead silence continued.

Tom Davis looked from one to another and coughed vigorously.

It was no use, he could not break the stillness which had fallen on the company like a spell.

Then he seized the poker and stirred the fire recklessly. If the truth must be told, he felt quite as disconcerted as the others did. At last, in sheer desperation, he said:

"Now, Farmer Groves, why don't you go on with your story?"

Farmer Groves looked askance at the stranger as he said:

"If the gentleman has no objection?"

"Oh! no; none in the least—none in the least. Go on—go on!"

The words were jerked out rather than uttered, and appeared to have a discomposing effect upon Farmer Groves, from which he only recovered by swallowing a huge draught of ale.

"Then the best way will be to begin again, for I almost forget where I left off."

"Very well—very well!" they all cried, glad of an opportunity of opening their mouths. "We are all listening!"

"Eight years ago this very night, as I and a few others were sitting with Tom Davis, the landlord here, as I might be with you now, chatting and laughing and the like, when all at once there came a most terrific knocking at the front door."

"You understand sir," interrupted Tom Davis, addressing the stranger, "that friend Groves had got just this far into his tale, and the words about the knocking were scarcely out of his mouth, before we heard some one begin hammering away, so we were all of us rather scared like."

The stranger made no reply, but looked steadily at the fire.

Tom Davis turned away with an offended air, while Groves continued his narrative.

"As it was nearly one o'clock in the morning and a most unusual time for any one to come, seeing that on any other night the inn was closed at ten to a moment, as it was so late, I say, we wondered who it could be, and hesitated before we went to the door."

"Just as we did to-night," said the landlord.

"When we unbarred it, to our surprise, who should we see on the threshold but Reuben Simms, the steward to Sir Herbert Burrows, of the old Manor House."

"He was a very disagreeable man, and very hard to



[DICK TURPIN CRIES "STAND AND DELIVER!" TO THE TRAVELLER ON THE HEATH.]

deal with, as many of Sir Herbert's tenants found. It was a sad pity things were left so much under his control; however, he's dead and gone now, though when he lived I question whether any one could have been found who would have said 'I like him!'

"Didn't expect to see me here to-night, did you?" he said, in his sharp voice. "Shouldn't have come, only Sir Herbert kept me so long, and I did not like to go so far by myself at night for fear I should be set on and robbed. I s'pose you can let me have a bed?"

"Oh! yes, of course; you will walk in and join us?"

"No, let me have a light," he said, "I want to go to bed and not sit up sotting with you."

"This was quite an uncalled-for remark for him to make in reply to our civility,—at least we thought so; but none said a word, because the old man was of a most revengeful disposition, and because we knew he had the power to spite any of us; so he took a light and went upstairs, down which he never came again alive."

"And if you will give me a candle, landlord," exclaimed the stranger, rising to his feet, and apparently

much agitated,—“if you will give me a light, I will go upstairs, for I hate blood and murder stories, and I can guess what's coming.”

"Certainly, sir, certainly, sir; you can have a light in a moment. If we had known you had any objection, why, of course, we would have deferred the tale-telling to another time."

"Oh! never mind, never mind. Are you ready?"

"Quite; be good enough to step this way."

Tom Davis showed the traveller into his room, and rejoined the company in the kitchen.

All this time Turpin sat in perfect silence, judging it was more prudent so to do.

"Now, Groves," said the landlord, "let's have the rest of the tale."

"There's not much of it to tell now, except that we all went home about daybreak, and the next morning, about twelve o'clock, thinking it strange Simms, the steward, did not come down, his bedroom was broken open, and there he was found weltering in his blood, and the apartment in the greatest disorder."

"And was his murderer never discovered?" asked several.

"Never! Numberless people were had up on suspicion, but it could not be brought home to any of them, and from that day to this it has remained an inexplicable mystery. Sir Herbert offered a very large reward for the apprehension of the murderer or murderess. It was five hundred pounds, I think, but no one was found out."

"How strange!" said one.

"Yes; in most cases the murderer leaves some traces behind him; but in this they had been too cautious."

"And did anyone know the motive for the murder?"

"Not exactly; old Simms had many enemies, but on that particular night he had received a large sum of money from Sir Herbert, for some purpose which we never learned; but it was all stolen from him."

"It's my belief it was theft, not malice, that was the motive," said Davis.

"And mine," said Groves. "Sir Herbert had him buried, for the old man had no kindred. It was rumoured however that he had a son who had been guilty of some crime, and who was always a ne'er-do-well sort of chap, who had gone abroad, but that was a many years ago, and no one knew for certain."

"Has the son ever turned up since?"

"Never, but—"

The remainder of the farmer's sentence was drowned in the loud explosion of a pistol which seemingly had been discharged just over their heads.

It was succeeded by one terrific, piercing shriek, after which all was deathly still.

"God bless my life!" said Davis, turning very pale, and staggering to his feet. "Surely another murder has not been committed."

Turpin also rose much agitated, for he had recognised the voice of the young girl whom he had befriended.

The remainder sat as if rooted to their seats.

"Follow me all!" said Dick, hastening to the door; and then, without waiting to see if he was obeyed, sprang lightly and rapidly up the staircase.

No sound of any description reached his ear as he paused for a moment on the landing and listened.

He was joined immediately by the landlord and about half-a-dozen of the most courageous of the company.

"Quick—quick, Davis!" cried Turpin. "Show me the room in which the young girl was placed."

The landlord pointed with his finger to a door nearly opposite, and without ceremony or hesitation, Dick flung it open, though his heart beat as he did so at a painful rate.

A night-light was burning in the room, and by its aid Dick saw a huddled-up mass of white upon the floor.

Instinctively he knew what it was; and while the others stood in a dense throng upon the threshold, he stepped forward and raised the form of the poor apprentice in his arms and placed her upon the bed.

She was either insensible or dead.

A glass of water stood upon a table close at hand, and he lost not an instant in sprinkling some of its contents upon her face.

Her eyes opened, and she looked around her with alarm and dread.

"What is it, Ellen? What has happened?" asked Dick, tenderly.

A smile played upon her lips as she heard his words, and then her eyes slowly closed again.

"Ellen—Ellen!" cried Turpin, "what has happened? Why did you scream?"

"I cannot tell," she replied, now perfectly aroused. "Yet stay! I remember now; I woke with the sound of a pistol-shot in my ears."

"I thought as much!" said Dick. "I must leave you now. There is no danger, and nothing to apprehend. Repose in peace."

"The traveller's room!" cried Dick, hurrying out again into the passage. "Let us go there at once!"

Davis led the way, and then they all paused in a body in front of a door opening from the opposite side of the passage.

Their numbers had been greatly increased while Dick was speaking to the young girl, and several of those who had come last carried lights in their hands.

Dick noticed that a figure of 8 was painted on the

"Why," said one, in rather a shaky voice "that is the very room old Simms was murdered in, isn't it?"

"Yes."

A disposition to draw back manifested itself instantly. Dick placed his hand upon the lock. The door was fast.

"Have you a key?" he asked.

"No. The door fastens on the inside with a bolt."

"I think we are justified in bursting the door open?"

"Certainly—certainly."

"I think," suggested Groves, "it would only be right to knock first."

"So it would."

Some heavy blows were struck upon the panel. There was no response.

"We are wasting time when every moment may be of the utmost value," said Dick.

"Right," replied the landlord; "force the door."

A simultaneous rush was made, and the door flew open in a moment.

"Lights—lights!"

Those who had hastily snatched up candles made their way into the room. The rest, who were somewhat timid, remained outside.

It took a moment for the candles to dispel the darkness in the room, and then they saw partly lying across the bed the man who had at so late an hour sought shelter.

Blood was gushing from his breast at a fearful rate, and it fell with a sickening sound upon the floor, where it collected into a huge pool.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the landlord, while those who were with him yet stood aghast with surprise. "Good heavens! what a frightful sight! The idea of it occurring at my house at all, let alone upon this particular night!"

"Does he live still?" asked one.

"I should scarcely think so," said Turpin, taking a candle from a man who was standing near him, and approaching the bed as he spoke. "I should scarcely think so; he appears to have shot himself through the heart!"

A faint sound, half-moan, half-sigh, came from the traveller's lips, and gave the lie to Turpin's supposition.

"By heaven!" they cried. "He is not dead yet! Raise him up a little!"

As Turpin had all through taken the initiative in the matter, he put the light down beside him, and, passing his arm under the body of the stranger, slowly raised him to a sitting posture.

The flow of blood was checked a little by this process, but a look of intense and unutterable suffering overspread his features.

Then he opened his eyes and glared around him as he muttered in a half-audible voice—

"Horror—horror! Why did they put me in this chamber above all others! Justice! justice! the old man is avenged at last! Off! off! You are blood! blood—nothing but blood! Father, father, I did not know you! How should I! how should I have done so! Do not look at me so awfully! Keep away—keep away! I was impelled by want to do the deed! Father, father, pity me, forgive me! Your form has haunted me sleeping and waking ever since that frightful night, eight years ago, when, in this room, I found on whom I had used my knife. What guided me here? What horrid fascination dragged me to this spot? Fate, for—I—"

A gasping kind of sob issued from the stranger's lips, and suddenly doubling together, his body, face downwards, reached the floor before Turpin could save him.

Horror—intense horror—was depicted upon the faces of the guests as they looked at each other, deprived of the fearful nature of the revelation of the stranger of the faculty of speech.

It was Turpin who broke the silence:

"Friends all," he said, in grave tones, "this is in itself a terrible spectacle, and enough to overcome the most callous heart. Let us leave this room, for we can do no good by staying in it, or we shall never be able to drive the appearance of this sight from our brains."

"Yes," added Tom Davis, with blanched cheek and lip, but yet in an authoritative voice. "Let us go away at once, for I feel sick to death!"

"And I—and I," responded many voices, in hushed accents, as they left the scene of blood, and resumed their places in the lower apartment.

The landlord went himself to the bar, and drew

each of the company a small glass of neat brandy, which was gratefully accepted by all.

There seemed to be a general disinclination to commence a conversation, and each seemed busy with his own thoughts.

"I say, neighbours," said Groves, at last, shifting about in his chair, "it appears to me that you ought to send off to Sir William at once, and let him know what has taken place."

"True," said Davis, who seemed unmoved by what had happened. "I am in such a state that I am only half conscious of what is going on."

"It is truly awful."

"It would be if it had been a simple suicide, but how horrible to think the murderer of Ralph the steward should be thus discovered!"

"And that it should turn out to be his own son, for such I take it was what the man meant."

"Frightful in the extreme. I remember him when he was a boy, and then it was prophesied by all that he would come to a bad end!"

"And so he has. I can imagine his terror and dismay when he found himself in the chamber in which he had murdered his own father!"

"Yes, and how the thought would drive him to suicide and madness!"

"Ay, indeed! It would be most strange if it did not. What must he not have suffered during the past eight years!"

"From what he has said though, I gather he had no idea when he committed the murder, doubtless for the sake of the money he had about him, that it was his own father!"

"Clearly not, or, at any rate, let us hope so."

"But," persisted Groves, "had not one or two of us better start at once for the hall. It is close upon day-break, and surely Sir Herbert will pardon us for arousing him at so unreasonable an hour when he learns our errand."

"By all means!" exclaimed several, rising. "Do you go, and we will accompany you!"

"Agreed," said Groves, and in a few minutes afterwards a little party of about a dozen persons was on its way to the hall.

Turpin remained behind. He had many urgent reasons for doing so, but he went to the front door of the inn along with Davis to see them off, and there they stood watching them until they were out of sight.

"Tom," said Turpin, in a whisper, as they both lingered on the steps, "of course you know very well I don't wish to be mixed up with the proceedings at the inquest which will have to be held, because of the danger which would result from calling me so publicly forward; but still it would be equally dangerous for me to set out for London at sunrise. The officers just now are more than usually on the alert after me."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Just this. My evidence, as there are so many witnesses who can depose to the same facts as I can, will be of little or no service, so I need not be mentioned in the matter at all. Find me some snug little place where I can remain until nightfall, when I must be off to London."

"As you like, Dick, my boy. I see no obstacles whatever; I will find you a comfortable berth, and as you say there is no need—although you did take rather a prominent part in the affair—for you to run the risk of giving evidence. There can only be one verdict returned."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK BIDS FAREWELL TO ELLEN, AND SETS OUT FOR LONDON TO SHOW THE LORD MAYOR'S CUP TO THE "FAMILY" AT THE "THREE TUNS."

THE shades of evening were just beginning to dusk all objects, when three persons stood at an old-fashioned bow-window on the ground floor of the "Hand and Keys."

These three persons were Dick, Ellen, and the landlord.

Dick was speaking.

"Ellen," he said, "you will then stay here along with my friend Davis so long as you may choose to do so. I am certain you will find him as kind and affectionate to you as though you were his daughter."

The poor girl could not trust herself to speak, for so much kindness touched her to the heart. Her eyes filled with tears, and she took a hand of each, and pressed them in token of her thanks.

"There, there—it is all right—it is all right," said Tom Davis. "Don't take on so much. I can only say, so long as the old roof is above my head you are very welcome to share it with me."

"And now," said Turpin, "it will soon be time for me to set out for London."

"London?" repeated Ellen. "Oh! no; do not go. Why run into so much danger?"

"Danger!" replied Turpin, with a laugh. "I never think of it. I must visit London to-night, in order to receive the money I have won by taking the mayor's cup."

"How much is it?" asked Davis.

"Fifty pounds!"

"Then it is hardly worth the risk."

"Not for the amount of money certainly. But having half won the bet it would be foolish to lose it by not complying with the other part of it."

Davis shook his head.

"I know you are sure to go," he said; "but it strikes me you have the most difficult part to perform."

"Why?"

"Why? Did not you tell me some one had split upon it, and set the officers on the watch?"

"Well, yes. That was my supposition from finding them so close at hand."

"And you were right; so rely upon it, now that attempt failed, knowing you intended to carry the cup in person to the 'Three Tuns,' they will so surround you with enemies that it will be impossible for you to make your escape with your life."

"Oh! how can you think of blindly rushing into so much peril! You cannot be in earnest."

Fain would the young girl have persuaded herself so, for she could not help feeling a deep interest in her protector; but the next words that came from Turpin's lips dispersed her hopes.

"I will do it," he said, "and defy the danger! The more of it there is, the greater will the achievement be."

"I see you are bent upon it, Dick," said the landlord, "and I know before to-day that when you take a thing into your head there is no turning you, so I sha'n't say more."

"I am bent upon it," replied Turpin, "and I must say I feel none of the apprehensions which you do."

"I suppose not."

"But I do," replied Ellen. "And now that I have found a friend and protector, do not let me lose him so soon. Don't go, for my sake."

"I see you are even more timid than Davis is."

"I am always timid when there is much danger."

"And I am bold, and on this occasion I feel an assurance that I shall come off all right."

"I hope you may," said Davis. "When do you want your mare?"

"Now," said Turpin, looking through the window, and observing the aspect of the night. "It is full early yet, but a fog seems to be rising rapidly. I hope it will be a dense one, for if it is I shall stand a much better chance of success."

"Then," said Davis, "I will go round to the stables, saddle Black Bess, and bring her to the door myself."

"Do so, do so."

The landlord departed on his errand.

"And now, my dear," said Turpin, drawing Ellen towards him, "pray dismiss from your mind all foolish feeling of alarm for my safety. I have returned unharmed from many a more dangerous expedition. Be happy. Davis and his wife will try their best to make you so, and do not let them fancy you ungrateful by showing them they have not succeeded."

"I will try to be happy and content."

"And," added Turpin, if I should not return, do not be alarmed. 'Tis impossible for me to say at any time where I may be in three hours afterwards. Let me desire it ever so much, I may be weeks before I pay another visit here."

"Weeks?"

"Yes; and in the meantime you will find time more pleasantly enough here."

Ellen shook her head.

"Not in your absence," she said.

"Mare's waiting at the door," said Davis, as he re-entered the room; "so I should advise you to be off as soon as possible, for you are well aware Bess never stands anywhere long together without attracting observation."

"And who can wonder at it?" asked Dick, proudly. "Her equal has never yet been found, and never will be I fancy!"

"Be off then! No one suspects your presence in this neighbourhood now, but they soon would if they saw her at the door."

"I am off. Good-bye, Ellen! Don't be alarmed about me. I shall be safe enough, don't fear. Expect me when you see me! Good-bye, good-bye!"

He hurried out of the room as he spoke.

A moment sufficed to take him to the huge front door of the "Hand and Keys," and there, just a few paces off, he could distinguish Black Bess.

The fog however was getting denser each moment.

"You will have an ugly journey, Dick," said Davis, as the highwayman mounted his mare. "I fancy it will soon be too thick for you to find your way."

"Not a bit. I could almost do it blindfold."

"I shouldn't wonder. You have been times enough."

"Rather; and I trust more to my mare than I do to myself," said Turpin, patting Bess's neck as he spoke.

"I am not surprised you are so fond of her."

"I should think not. And now, Davis, as it may be some time before I see you again, I should like to have a serious parting word with you."

"Speak out, my boy!"

"I allude to the young girl, Ellen."

"I guessed as much."

"And?"

"Now, don't let that trouble your mind at all. I will take care of her, and mind, as well, that she comes to no harm through you."

"Ah! ah!"

"You needn't laugh. I can see through a ladder before the rounds are knocked out."

"I don't doubt it."

"She has taken a fancy to you—more's the pity."

"Pho! pho!"

"There's no disguising the fact."

"Then, to put an end to all jesting," said Turpin, gathering the reins in his hand, "I will promise you she shall never be wronged by me."

"I am glad of it, Dick, very glad; for I already feel as though she was my own daughter."

"Good-bye, then, Davis, old fellow, treat her as a daughter, and I am sure you will find her all that you desire."

As Turpin spoke these words he waved his hand, and, gently pricking Bess upon the flank, was in a moment out of sight in the thick fog.

"It's a sad pity," soliloquized the landlord, while he stood for a moment on the door-step, "a sad pity, that a man like him should have taken to the road. He is a brave heart, and I don't believe he would do an ungenerous action for the world. If he had only had the opportunity many have, what a great man he would have become. Now what is he? Perhaps going to his death. It is a sad pity."

"It is indeed," said a gentle voice at his elbow, and, turning round, Tom Davis saw the young girl whom he had so soon learned to love standing by his side.

CHAPTER XIII.

TURPIN ROBS SIR THEODORE HOUGHTON ON HIS WAY TO LONDON.

"GENTLY, Bess; gently, mare!" said Turpin, to his steed. "There is no hurry, lass. We have a good four hours before us."

Bess subsided into a gentle trot.

"Well," thought our hero, as he carried his hand to his pocket to make sure the cup was all right, "a few things have happened, certainly, since I took this cup out of the fat mayor's carriage; out the strangest thing of all, and the one I cannot banish from my imagination, is the spectral shadowy form which I feel convinced I saw in the lane. What could it be? What can it portend?"

"I was a fool not to have ridden forward," he mut-

tered, after a few moments' thought. "I will not believe it was anything supernatural. I was wounded. My brain was confused and giddy, and I had not that ready command over my actions that I generally have. Let me catch sight of it again, and I will chase the figure until I discover what it is."

His ruminations and resolves were quickly put to flight, for, indistinctly and muffled by the opaque atmosphere, came the tramp of a horse's hoofs upon his ears.

He paused to listen.

He had reached a small open space, but across which he could not see. He only knew that he was not in the roadway by feeling that Bess was treading upon turf.

The sound of the approaching footsteps came from the rear.

"It is a single traveller," said Dick, "and he comes most opportunely. My pockets are almost empty. It is to be hoped he carries a good booty."

The traveller was approaching slowly and cautiously, as though he was by no means sure of his footing.

Turpin wheeled round.

Then he quietly waited until the unsuspecting rider should be close to him.

At length, when he judged from the loneliness of the sound that the solitary horseman was at about fifty paces distant, he gave Bess the reins, and swept swiftly down the lane.

"Stand and deliver!" he cried in loud tones, and at the same time holding a pistol to the astonished rider's breast. "Your money or your life!"

"Neither, you villain!" said a voice; and, before Dick anticipated any such event, the rider fired a pistol point blank at his face.

Turpin shook in his saddle.

The bullet had been well aimed.

It struck his hat from his head, and ploughed up his scalp in its passage.

Before, however, the traveller could follow up the advantage he had so undoubtedly gained, Dick recovered himself, and, rapidly bringing his weapon to a level, pulled the trigger.

There was a flash and a report!

The shot was seemingly effective, for the traveller uttered a loud cry of pain.

He did not, though, fall from his seat, but preserved an upright position.

"Quick!" said Dick, "your money, watch, and trinkets! You have only yourself to thank for what you have got!"

No reply.

"Come, come," added Dick, "hand them over, or I shall be forced to take them, and, generally speaking, I am not over gentle when I do!"

"You have shattered my right arm," replied the traveller, "and I am powerless! Were it not for that, and the excruciating pain it occasions me, I would struggle with you to the last! You can please yourself how much you maltreat a wounded man who cannot struggle with you!"

"Use your left hand!" said Turpin, leaning forward towards him.

"I will, and do!" cried the traveller, in an excited voice.

At the same moment Turpin heard the click of another pistol. It simply flashed in the pan.

"You are a treacherous rascal!" shouted Turpin. "Take that."

He doubled up his fist, and struck the traveller a terrific blow in the face.

He swayed from one side of his horse to the other, and then losing his balance, fell on the ground.

"I hope that's a settler!" said Turpin. "I do hate treachery above all things. I wonder if he has got much in his pockets?"

As he asked himself this question, he dismounted and stooped over his prostrate foe, who lay very still indeed.

Turpin shook him rather roughly, as he said:

"Come, now, it's no good your shamming in that way. I have had enough of it."

An inarticulate sound, either a curse or a groan, Dick could not tell which, was all that he got by way of response, so he added:

"It's no good losing time. It's a troublesome affair, very. I only hope he has got enough about him to make

it worth my while! Let's see! here's a nice watch—repeater, I think—with chain and seals. Not so bad. A pocket-book. Not very fat. A purse! Ah! heavy too. Bravo! Breast-pin. Gold of course. Two rings! Diamonds, doubtless. Anything else? No."

While uttering these disjointed sentences, Turpin made a perquisition of his enemy, and having examined the different articles which he took, transferred them to his own pocket.

"I should very much like to know," said Turpin, as he rose to his feet, "whether I did shatter his right arm as he said I did? It's so confounded dark. I can't see. Stop a bit. Yes I can."

He produced a small bull's-eye lantern from his pocket, and as his antagonist gave no signs of motion, very leisurely proceeded to light it.

In a moment or two, as the wick fairly caught light, he was able to throw a tolerably broad ray of light around him.

"Your face is damaged considerably, my friend," he said, as he turned the light full upon the traveller's features, which were covered with blood. "I never gave such a fair blow in my life! Never!"

Then he proceeded to make a more minute observation.

"What a deceitful fellow he must be, to be sure. He's not wounded in the arm. He thought of having me, I dare say, but he has found his match. That reminds me to look after the wound I fancy he gave me in my head. Oh! it's nothing—absolutely nothing! Why, I don't believe it has bled a dozen drops! I shall be none the worse for that, though it was a very narrow escape!"

"What shall I do with this fellow now? Leave him where he is, in the middle of the road? It would serve him right! Ah! did you speak?"

The traveller certainly did not speak, but he raised himself up off the ground a little, looking rueful and woebegone in the extreme.

"Villain!" he said, as his eyes fell upon Turpin, "you have conquered and robbed me. I made sure I should put an end to your career!"

"How kind of you, to be sure!"

"And I should have done so if my infernal pistol had not missed fire!" he continued, for he was recovering rapidly.

"Well, why don't you wipe your face? Can't you feel it's all over blood?"

"You shall pay dearly for this, my spark," said the traveller, as he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

"You won't carry this game on always. I'm a magistrate, I'd let you know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and vagrants like yourself tremble when they hear my name!"

"What is it?"

"Sir Theodore Houghton, sir!"

Turpin shook his head.

"Never heard it before."

The magistrate opened his mouth to an unnatural width in token of his astonishment.

"Never heard it?"

"Never."

"Oh! impossible. My name is well known everywhere!"

"Among the family, I suppose."

"The family?"

"Yes, the light-fingered profession. Easy-come-easy-go sort. You understand?"

"I do, and I can tell you it is woe to those who are brought up before me."

"Oh!"

By this time the magistrate had risen to his feet, and was evidently getting better every moment.

"I am unarmed now," he added, "or I would try what I could do."

"I suppose you called it fair play to fire upon me as you did?"

"Most assuredly! Everything is fair to a felon like you?"

"That's your opinion!"

"And everybody else's that's got any sense."

"Of course."

"Well, now, your worship," said Dick, with a mocking air, "it appears by what you have said, you have endeavoured to make your name a terror to those who

might be brought up before you; and, to do so, you have, no doubt, unjustly punished many!"

"And what if I have?" asked Sir Theodore, preparing to ramount his steed.

"Why, we will just have a little bit of retributive or poetical justice upon you. Remember, you are wholly in my power."

The worthy magistrate glared around in some dismay.

No living thing was either within sight or hearing, and he rather anxiously waited to hear what Turpin said next.

He was not long kept in suspense, for Dick said—

"I am going to a large meeting of the family to-night, and I am determined you shall go with me. I shall have great pleasure in presenting you to their notice, and still greater in handing you over to them to be dealt with according as they think proper. Of course, letting them know the cowardly and treacherous attempt you made upon my life!"

"Help—help! Murder!" shouted Sir Theodore, as Turpin announced this resolution. "Why, they would tear me limb from limb if they once got me in their clutches. You cannot mean that. Help—mercy!"

"I do mean it," said Turpin, "and consider I am doing no more than right, and acting in a merciful way towards you. As you have been so fond of administering punishment to others, you shall try how you like to have it administered to yourself."

During this short conversation Turpin had not once let go the grasp he had fastened upon him.

"And look here," added our hero; "do you see this?"

It was a long, bright-barrelled pistol which he asked him if he saw.

"I do."

"That's all right. Now listen to what I am going to say, and take warning. Are you listening?"

"Ye—es."

"This pistol is one by which I set great store, and I never produce or use it except upon extraordinary occasions. It is made with the utmost nicety; carries a ball to its mark as true as a hair, and never misses fire! I wish you to impress that strongly on your memory. It never misses fire! Now, if you wish to preserve your life a little longer, obey my directions, or, if you do not, why?"

He cocked and levelled the pistol in a manner by far more significant than pleasant.

The magistrate's teeth chattered when he heard the sound, and saw the weapon brought to bear upon his person.

"Now, mount," said Turpin.

Sir Theodore obeyed.

"Now take off your cravat, and tie one end firmly round your right wrist."

The pistol still covered him, so he perforce obeyed.

Turpin snatched up his lantern and caught hold of the other extremity of the cravat, having first assured himself that it was properly secured to his companion's arm, and then mounted on the back of Black Bess.

"Quick march," he cried; "and bear in mind that at the very first attempt you make to get free, I fire!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR THEODORE HOUGHTON TURNS OUT A VERY BAD CHARACTER INDEED.

It was in this strange fashion, then, Turpin and his companion made their way to London. Sir Theodore quietly resigned himself to his fate, and therein showed his wisdom. He was fully impressed with the idea that certain and immediate death would be the penalty for trying to get away, while he thought, by peacefully surrendering to his foe, he would be in a position to take advantage of any unlooked-for circumstance that might occur.

As, however, time passed, and they rapidly neared London without meeting a soul, he began to quake with fear, for he knew pretty well what he had to expect at the hands of the "family."

The fog which had settled down soon after sunset got no thinner as they neared the metropolis.

"And now there's one more thing, Sir Magistrate," said Turpin, breaking the silence: "if you cry out for

assistance in any way, it's a case with you. As sure as you do, I fire."

"Oh! let me go, pray let me go at once! I promise to forego all idea of punishing you in any way and taking my revenge for what I have suffered to-night. Come, you are only doing this to frighten me. Let me go!"

"Shouldn't you like it? No, no! When I let you go, it will be into the hands of the 'family.'"

Sir Theodore relapsed into silence.

They reached at last the corner of Broad-street, St. Giles's. Turpin made his way down a dark-looking archway, taking his companion with him.

Several narrow turnings branched off from the bottom of this gateway, and, after proceeding a short distance down one, Turpin paused.

Then he blew a whistle which had a very peculiar sound.

"Dismount!" said Turpin, at the same time alighting from his steed, but taking care the magistrate should not give him the slip.

He blew the whistle a second time.

A man bearing a lantern came rapidly towards them.

Turpin addressed some words to this man, but what they meant Sir Theodore had no idea. It was in an unknown language to him.

The man with the lantern, however, understood him, evidently, for he said something in reply, and then, taking the two steeds by the bridle, he led them away.

"Forward!" said Turpin, seizing his companion's hand, and dragging him quickly down another alley, at the bottom of which he paused before a low door in the wall.

This door swung silently open, without any person making themselves visible.

A long, narrow passage, dimly lighted, appeared beyond.

Turpin led Sir Theodore down it.

At its extremity was a flight of steps, and then another door, opening into a huge apartment, which deserves a line of description.

It was not very wide, but of prodigious length. A table, formed of one long plank, stretched almost from one end to the other, and on both sides of this were seated probably a hundred persons, variously engaged smoking, drinking, talking, singing, swearing, all at once.

The noise was perfectly deafening.

The magistrate shrunk back in alarm.

At the further end of the table a man was seated in a chair much higher than the others.

As soon as he saw the new comers appear upon the threshold this man hammered violently upon the table with the pewter pot from which he had been drinking.

"Silence! si—lence!" he cried.

By slow degrees the tumult subsided into a low hum of voices.

Turpin stepped boldly up to the table.

"Hurrah! bravo! bravo! It's Turpin the bold! Three cheers, friends, he's brought the lord mayor's cup."

"Order!" yelled the chairman, at the top of his voice, and banging the pewter pot more violently upon the table than before—"order, pals! Who's the strange ty he's brought with him?"

Immediate attention was directed to Sir Theodore Houghton, who endeavoured to avoid the scrutiny as much as possible.

"Who is he? who is he? Name—name!" they shouted.

Turpin held up his hand for permission to address them.

"This, my friends," he said, "is a gentleman I have great pleasure in introducing to your notice. His name is Sir Theodore Houghton, and he is a county magistrate."

As he spoke, Turpin pushed his companion forward.

A deep roar of execration came from the throats of those assembled as they heard the name pronounced, and the greater part rose from their seats, while those who were nearest clutched the unfortunate magistrate tightly wherever they could obtain a hold.

He shook with fear.

"Death! death! Down with the unjust judge! Kill him—kill him!"

"Silence! si—lence!" again shouted the chairman, and making his voice heard above all the din. "On to

the table with him! We'll try him. I'll be judge. You shall be jury!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the thieves. "Bravo! Up with him!"

And, despite the resistance which he made, he was lifted by twenty hands at least on to the table.

He was compelled by blows to assume an erect position.

"Mercy, gentlemen, mercy!" he said, in trembling tones, and with shaking limbs. "Mercy, mercy!"

"All right! We know what you mean by mercy, and you shall have plenty of it!"

"Order!" again exclaimed the chairman. "Take your seats, mates. He shall be tried! Let us manage the affair in a decent manner."

It was a rule with that disorderly assembly that a chairman should be appointed every night by the general voice, and that he should, while he held that position, have the others under his command.

Slowly, therefore, and muttering threats against the unhappy wretch who had fallen into their power, they obeyed, and seated themselves in their respective places.

"Prisoner, advance!" said the chairman.

"Forwards!" exclaimed those who were nearest to him, compelling him to walk to the middle of the long table.

"Who accuses the prisoner?"

"I do!" said Turpin, stepping forward.

"Of what?"

"A treacherous attempt upon my life!"

"Now, prisoner, do you plead Guilty or Not Guilty?"

Sir Theodore Houghton looked about him in a bewildered manner; he could hardly believe in the reality of the scene that was enacting before him.

The chairman repeated his question.

"Not Guilty!" replied the magistrate, nervously.

"State your charge!"

"I will, your lordship," said Turpin.

There was a laugh at this.

"Silence in the court!" shouted another voice.

The laugh grew louder still. There was something so uncommonly comic about this assumption of judicial form.

"I was on the way from Hornsey to London," continued Turpin, "when all at once I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs beating against the road. Thinking I might be able to do a little business, I pulled up and waited for the horseman to make his appearance."

"Quite right!"

"Presently, when he was only a few yards off, I rode forward, and requested him to pay the toll!"

"Well?"

"Then, your lordship, without saying a word, and before I was at all prepared for such an event, he fired a pistol full in my face. It knocked off my hat, and grazed my scalp, but did me no more damage."

"That's lucky!"

"It was, your lordship! Of course, I wasn't long recovering myself, and then I fired at him in return."

"Quite right!"

He gave a cry, and called out that he was hit, and said he could not hand over himself. Not suspecting anything, I leaned forward to clear his pockets myself, when he put another pistol to my breast, and pulled the trigger!"

"The miscreant!"

"Si—lence!" said the crier again, or rather one man who had taken that office upon himself.

"Very fortunately for me, your lordship," Turpin continued, "the pistol only flashed in the pan, so I was unhurt. I did not stop to take out another pistol, but doubled up my fist, and hit him such a fair smack in the face, that down he went off his horse into the road at once!"

"Now, prisoner," said the *pseudo* judge, "what have you to say in your defence?"

"I defended my property," replied the baronet, who had an idea that he might get on better if he put a bold face on the matter.

"How came you to bring him here?"

"He told me he was a magistrate, and boasted how he served those who were unlucky enough to be brought up before him."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, your lordship; so I thought as I was coming

here, I would bring him with me, and put him upon his trial, and see how he liked it!"

"A very proper idea."

"I thought so, and here he is!"

"Now," said the judge, "is there any gentleman present who has suffered any injustice at his hands?"

"Yes, yes! Me! me! me!"

Twenty voices at least replied to his words.

"I can't hear you all, gentlemen! Let the one who has the strongest case against him step forward. If we find him guilty, sentence shall be pronounced!"

"Agreed! Who stands forward?"

"I do!" said a voice.

A tall, respectable-looking man got up off his seat.

"Order for Gentleman George!" shouted the chairman.

Sir Theodore turned ghastly pale as soon as his eyes fell upon this man, and he trembled so excessively that he could scarcely keep his feet.

The man who had been called Gentleman George began to speak, and there was an immediate silence.

"My case is a very hard one," he said, "but I will relate it in as few words as possible."

"Silence!" said the orier again, who, though there was no noise, thought, as the speaker paused, he ought to say something.

"It is nearly ten years ago now since I entered the prisoner's service. He was a justice then, and I was employed as his clerk. I lived in the same house with him."

Sir Theodore's agitation rapidly increased, and he glared wildly at the faces by which he was surrounded, upon every one of which he saw an inimical expression.

He evidently dreaded what was coming next.

"I shall not go minutely into my story," continued Gentleman George, "because it would take up too much time, I will only say that Sir Theodore had a daughter."

His voice wavered slightly, but, recovering himself with an effort, he went on—

"We were thrown much together, and, as she was about my own age, there was nothing wonderful in our falling in love with each other. It was folly and wickedness on my part, but who can control his destiny?"

"We kept our attachment secret for some time, but eventually it was discovered. With the exercise of that treachery and duplicity which seem native to him, he called me into his library, remonstrated with me, yet kindly and gently. I could say nothing, for I felt I was in the wrong."

"After what has occurred," he said, for I can recollect his words as well as I could if I had just heard them—after what has occurred, you must feel the impossibility of remaining any longer in my service. I do not wish to deal harshly with you so long as you leave this place. If you absent yourself, there is a probability of my daughter forgetting her unfortunate passion, so I beg of you as a favour I think you ought to grant, that you will place as great a distance as you can between this house and yourself."

"What could I do but consent? Fool that I was, I ought to have distrusted his kindness, and feared it more than his anger."

"I have no fault to find with you," he said, "in the way you have executed your duties. There is half a year's salary due to you; I will write you a cheque for that amount, and two hundred pounds in addition, upon the sole condition that you never return here. It will serve to pay your travelling expenses, and to support you until you find some fresh employment. Do not hesitate to accept it. It is a sum of money I can well spare."

He wrote out a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds, placed it in an envelope, and gave it to me.

"This was acting magnanimously to all appearance, and, like a fool I believed he was sincere. I ought to have known from his behaviour on other occasions that I ought to expect the worse."

"I took the cheque and bade him good-bye. I went to my room, packed up all my things, and took them down to the coach office, and secured a place for myself in the mail, as I intended to go to Liverpool, where many of my friends resided."

"The bank was at a town four miles distant from Sir Theodore's house, and I got there just as the bank was closing. However, as they knew me, the man at the

counter just glanced at the cheque, and handed me over the money."

"In an hour afterwards I was in the coach and on my way to Liverpool."

"And now," said Gentleman George, as he looked around, "the black part of my story is yet to come. It is so foul and monstrous, that you will never believe it possible any man could act in so diabolical a manner."

He paused for a moment, and wiped his face, while the rest of his story was waited for with a stillness that was positively painful.

"I reached Liverpool on the fourth night. I will pass over my own feelings and reflections, but you can guess they were far from pleasant; still, the sense of no impending evil weighed upon me."

"I at first intended to see my friends, but I afterwards altered my mind, and determined to leave England for ever and go to America."

"A vessel of several hundred tons burden, was just upon the point of sailing for New York, and I engaged a berth on board."

"The following morning, just as they were about to weigh anchor, a boat filled with many persons shot out from the quay, and was rowed rapidly towards us."

"They made signals for the captain to pause."

"As the boat neared the ship's side, we all noticed it was filled with police-officers."

"They are after some one who has absconded," I thought, and I looked round at those passengers who were standing in a throng round me wondering which it could be.

"Five minutes afterwards, the officers came on board, and spoke to the captain. Then they came towards us."

"I looked on with some curiosity, but who can imagine my surprise when the chief stepped up to me and put his hand on my shoulder?"

"You were almost off," he said; "but we've caught you. Come along, and don't detain the vessel any longer."

"I was thunderstruck."

"Am I to understand you have a charge against me?"

"He, ha! That's good—werry good!" said the officer. "Come along, and don't make a rumpus!"

"I don't understand you," I said. "I have done nothing to make me answerable to the laws."

"Oh, no! I don't suppose you have. However, here is a warrant for forging a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds upon Sir Theodore Houghton, and making off with it."

"It is false," I cried. "Sir Theodore wrote the cheque himself?"

"That may be. I don't say it isn't, but you must come along with me. It looks very strange, though, for you to receive this money, leave without saying a word to anyone, and then embark for New York."

"It flashed upon my mind in a moment how bad a construction could be placed upon my actions. I was overwhelmed, but I was not conscious of the full extent of my misfortune."

Gentleman George paused a moment for breath.

All still remained silent. They seemed spellbound.

A cold sweat burst out at every pore of the magistrate's body, and he sank upon his knees on the table.

He strove to speak, but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"I have only a word or two more to say," resumed Gentleman George, sadly, "I shall not detain you much longer. I was brought back to Sir Theodore's, manacled like a felon. I was had up, the charge made, and committed to the assizes."

"A weary time to me elapsed, and then I was placed upon my trial. My friends had heard of me, and had engaged an eminent counsel for my defence. His eloquence, however, was of no avail. Sir Theodore here entered the witness-box, and perjured himself by swearing that he had never had any such conversation with me, as I said he had, and appealed to those who knew him, and asked if they thought he would be likely to have acted in such a manner? My whole statement, he said, was most preposterous and absurd, for was it probable he would give a large sum of money to one who had done him such an injury? The natural course for anyone to take would be to turn me ignominiously from the house. He dwelt, also, upon my baseness in bringing his

daughter's name before the court as a screen for my bad conduct. The trial lasted many hours, and everything he said damaged me.

"In his examination, he distinctly swore, that he knew nothing of my leaving him until the morning following my departure, when the cashier from the bank came over to ask him about a cheque which they had cashed just as the bank was closing on the previous day. He declared it to be a forgery, and asked by whom it had been presented.

"He was told, of course, by me.

"I was sent for, but no one knew better than himself that I was far away, and was not to be found. It was, all said, a clear case of forgery and absconding; so a warrant was obtained for my apprehension, and I was arrested in the way I told you.

"My counsel could not shake the prosecutor's evidence in any way. There was no flaw in it. The judge summed up, the jury returned a verdict of Guilty, and I was sentenced to be executed!

"And so, you see, by his diabolical ingenuity, was I, an innocent man in thought and deed, convicted of a capital offence!

"But his vengeance was not sated as I have no doubt he hoped it would be. By the assistance of my friends I was enabled to escape, and so I eluded the dread penalty of the law. But since then I have never dared to show my face. I have been forced to become an outcast and a thief!

"As for the wretch who brought all this upon me and blighted my future hopes, I have never seen him since he stood in the witness-box until he was brought in to-night, and then I recognised him instantly. If you have any doubt of my statement, look at him now, and tell me whether he looks like an innocent man!"

The man who had related this fearful tale of prospects blighted, and who was known only to his associates under the name of Gentleman George, raised his hand as he finished speaking and pointed to the shrinking, cowardly wretch upon the table.

"Guilty—guilty!" they all cried, fiercely, as they rose tumultuously to their feet, and stretched out their hands towards him.

The chairman banged the table.

"Order! gentlemen of the jury, order! Do you forget that you are in a court of justice? Be seated, and let us hear what the prisoner has to say in his defence!"

They obeyed.

"Prisoner on the table," said the judge, as soon as silence was restored, "what have you to urge in your behalf?"

White as ashes, his teeth chattering in his head, Sir Theodore Houghton rose trembling to his feet.

He licked his parched lips.

"It's all false!" he said, in a hoarse, hollow whisper. "False from first to last. He is guilty, and was rightly sentenced!"

Then he sank again, half fainting, upon the table.

The chairman, in his capacity of judge, then very formally summed up.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, and his tones got graver and more solemn as he proceeded, "you have heard the evidence which has been given against the prisoner, and it remains for you to deliberately weigh it in your minds. Do you consider the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

As if with one voice those who were assembled cried, the moment the words left his lips—

"Guilty!"

Then there was a dead silence.

"Prisoner on the table," said the chairman, "you have heard the verdict which has been recorded against you. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

"It's all a mockery!" shrieked Sir Theodore, springing to his feet as if galvanised. "A hideous mockery! I refuse to be tried, or submit to this farce any longer!"

"You cannot help yourself; the general voice has pronounced you guilty, and the court now proceeds to pass sentence upon you. The sentence is the same that you so unjustly caused to be passed upon Gentleman George, namely, that you be hanged by the neck until you be dead!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE OFFICERS CAPTURE DICK TURPIN AT THE "THREE TUNS."

No one spoke for some seconds after the sentence was thus pronounced.

Sir Theodore strove hard to make some articulate sound, but in vain.

Horror had possession of his soul.

He knew his guilt, and he felt that the hour of retribution had at last arrived.

He clasped his hands together in an agony of mute supplication.

It was the chairman who broke the silence.

"Who will be his executioner?" he said.

A man rose instantly.

"That will I," he said, "for I have suffered much injury from this most unjust judge. I will carry the sentence into effect, and so give a warning to others. Who has a rope?"

Several pieces five or six feet in length were handed to him.

He tied them all securely together.

Half-a-dozen iron hooks were fixed in the roof, and to the largest of these the man made fast one end of the rope.

The other end he made into a noose.

The next operation was to pinion the miserable prisoner, and, in spite of his desperate resistance and frantic shrieks for mercy, this was quickly done.

A chair was placed immediately beneath the hook, and Sir Theodore forced to stand in it.

Then the rope was adjusted round his neck.

The expression on his face was awful to see.

The "family" sat looking on in grim silence.

"Help! help! Murder! murder!" screamed Sir Theodore, in a cracked voice—for the so-close presence of death restored him his voice. "Help! help! Mercy! mercy!"

"Confess, then, while yet you have time."

"I do! I do! The charge was wholly false, and I got it up to avenge the wrong he had done me. What he told you was true. Release me! Release me!"

"No, now you have confessed to the perpetration of so horrible a crime, you shall die!" said the chairman.

"We can feel no doubt as to your guilt, and shall carry out the sentence without compunction!"

"No—no! Save me! Save me!"

The chair was suddenly knocked from under him, and the sentence checked upon his lips. He gave a desperate plunge, and struggled slightly—then all was over.

Sir Theodore Houghton had met with the reward he merited.

"I have him! I have him! Surrender! surrender!" cried several loud voices at this moment, as a large party of police-officers dashed headlong into the room, while half-a-dozen at least, clung to Dick; and, before he was conscious of what had occurred, he found himself overpowered and a prisoner.

The attention of every one present had been so riveted upon the fearful termination of Sir Theodore Houghton's life, and so absorbed by the terrible narrative of Gentleman George, that the whole of them were, in a manner of speaking, quite deaf and blind to any extraneous circumstances; and so the police-officers, whose measures had been very carefully taken, were actually in full possession of the entire premises before the lawless company had any idea that they were menaced by danger in the least.

Even Turpin, watchful as he usually was, had been unable to resist the powerful interest which the exciting tragedy produced in every breast; indeed, so intense was it, that his breath came short and thick. In fact, he, as well as all the rest, was spell-bound.

The sudden irruption of the officers, however, and the loud shouts of their leader, in a moment aroused their slumbering activity.

Instantly all were upon their feet, and a desperate struggle immediately commenced, and several of the "family," seeing our hero so surrounded, sprang forward to attempt his rescue.

Sir Theodore Houghton was, of course, well known to all the officers, for his severe sentences had made



[THE OFFICERS CHASE TURPIN THROUGH SOHO.]

everywhere notorious, and, as soon as they recognized him, half a dozen rushed forward to cut him down.

They were too late though to save his life.

The fall was very sudden, and the magistrate no inconsiderable weight, the effect of which two circumstances was that his neck was dislocated.

The officers were not long in discovering this, for when they set him up so that he should have a chance of reviving a little, his head lolled about in every direction.

So soon, then, as they ascertained that life was really extinct, they left him, and turned towards those who had sprung upon Turpin.

They had every need of their aid, for they found it a most difficult task to keep their hold upon their prisoner, and defend themselves at the same time from the violent assault that was made upon them.

Already had Turpin got one of his arms free, and was dealing heavy blows, which made his captors shrink, when the other body of officers reached the excited, struggling mass.

The numbers were about equal.

NO. 5.—BLACK BESS.

The yelling, shouting, and swearing were tremendous. "Give him up! Give him up!" shrieked an officer, mounting on to the table. "Give him up and you shall all go free! It's only him we want, and we're bound to have him, so give him up at once!"

No notice whatever was taken of this speech.

Then this officer, who was doubtless one of those in command, grew furious when he found himself disregarded, and ran towards the end of the table near which the struggle was now taking place.

We have before had occasion to remark that this table in the thieves' kitchen was composed simply of one plank. This was supported on three tressels.

When the officer rushed forward so suddenly to its extremity his weight tilted it up, so down he went on the floor in a moment, and was buried nearly under an avalanche of pewter pots.

Blood was trickling from his head and face when he again rose to his feet, but, heedless of the hurts he had sustained, he dashed like a maniac into the thickest of the fight.

Turpin, too, was injured in many places, but struggled desperately, for he resolved not to be taken alive without an effort.

He got his other arm free.

Upon seeing this, the officers redoubled their endeavours.

Turpin was an immense favourite with all the "family," and there was scarcely one of them who would not willingly have laid down his life to render him a service.

Therefore they fought most gallantly in his behalf. They knew the motive which had brought him there.

Feeling that the issue of the conflict was very uncertain, Turpin commenced slowly to retreat backwards to the door, intending, if once he could get into the passage, to make a bold rush for escape.

The "family" divined his intention immediately, and so, too, did the police officers; but the former made such a sudden attack upon the latter, that they had much ado to defend themselves.

Two men only interposed between Turpin and the door he was so anxious to reach. Turning round sharply upon his heel, he, by a well-directed blow, laid one prostrate, and sprang past the other, who, however, grasped him tightly by the skirts of his coat.

Dick placed his hands behind him, and plunged forward. Many rapid footsteps followed him.

"The door is guarded!" exclaimed Dick, involuntarily, as his eye fell upon four men standing near it.

"Surrender, or we fire!" they cried, upon seeing him approach.

"Never!" said Dick; and as he spoke he ran up a narrow flight of stairs which were close at his left hand.

The next instant several of the officers who had disengaged themselves from the fray which was still going on in the kitchen, came along the passage, and sprang up the stairs after Dick, who, however, had made good use of the brief start which he had obtained.

He was already at the top.

He saw then several doors, all of which were closed. Without pausing to choose, he placed his hand upon the fastenings of one just opposite to him, and opened it. All was profound darkness within.

Very dimly, though, and as if a curtain had been drawn across it, Turpin saw the outline of a window.

He hastily ascended the door.

He heard the officers stamping up the staircase.

Rejoiced at having successfully eluded them so far, he crept forward on his hands and knees towards the window, for he judged that to be the likeliest means of avoiding a collision with whatever furniture there might be in the room, which, for aught he knew to the contrary, might be a bed-chamber, and occupied by some one.

The room was limited in its dimensions, and he very quickly reached the window, and drew the curtain from before it.

"Bang! bang! bang! bang!" came four heavy blows upon the panel of the door.

Dick flung open the window.

It was one of those diamond-paned casements opening like a door, and permitting easy egress.

Just below him Dick saw the roofs of some outbuildings, and he dropped down upon them.

"I fancy," he said, "I shall be able to make my way into some of the courts, and then very likely I shall get free!"

While speaking he slid down the tiles, and, as he expected, found himself only about ten or twelve feet from the ground.

Grasping the gutter with his hands, he quickly, but yet carefully, lowered himself, and then dropped to the earth.

No sooner did he reach it than the window through which he had just passed was dashed open, and several persons scrambled out of it on to the roof.

Turpin found himself standing in a narrow alley, but, hearing his pursuers so close behind him, did not pause for breath, but hastily wiped the perspiration from his face and shot off at full speed.

A half-shout—half-yell—from the rear told him he was already seen.

He quickened his speed.

The alley he was traversing he knew would take him into Dudley-street, and he was in hopes, could he gain

it, that he would, by the intimate knowledge of the locality he possessed, succeed in baffling his pursuers.

Oh! how he wished for his bonny steed when he did reach it, and looked up and down to assure himself that no enemy was in sight. How easy, then, would have been escape! But now there was every prospect of his being hunted through the streets on foot.

"Stop him! Stop him!" he heard his pursuers cry. "Stop him! A highwayman! A thousand pounds reward!"

The sounds came upon his ears with great distinctness.

He ran across the street and down another turning into Soho, but the shouts of the officers had aroused the neighbourhood, and there was quickly a crowd at his heels which increased in numbers every moment.

In as direct a line as he could, Turpin made his way towards the Oxford-road, as Oxford-street was then called, the vague idea of reaching the country filling his mind.

He had trusted by doubling, the corners of the streets suddenly to get out of sight of his pursuers, and then seek shelter and concealment in a house.

But they were too close upon his track for this hope to hold possession of him long, and the whole of his energies were bent on running at a swifter pace than they.

A considerable distance had been already passed over, and Turpin began to show signs of exhaustion. His breathing was painful, and he staggered more than once. He felt quite sure that he could not much longer maintain his present speed, and unless succour of some kind presented itself, and that quickly, he must abandon all idea of getting free from those who were hunting him.

He passed by many a turning on his route down which he was afraid to turn lest it should be a yard and have no outlet. If he once went down one of these he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

Presently he saw a street which he recognised with a throb of delight. It was a very short one, and he plunged down it, and round the corner to the right and then to the left.

His pursuers were out of sight.

He redoubled his efforts.

Half-a-dozen turnings more, and he was in Oxford-road.

It is a very difficult matter to imagine one of the important and most crowded thoroughfares in London a quiet country road, bounded by trees and meadows, and yet such was Oxford-street at the time of which we write.

Dick could hear the voices and footsteps of the crowd, but he could not see their forms.

On the other side of the way, and near a gate in a garden wall, was a servant in livery, leading a horse by the bridle, and apparently waiting for some one.

"A godsend!" said Dick. "I shall be free now!"

He rushed across the road as he spoke, and before the servant knew at all what was going to happen, he found himself sprawling on the ground.

Turpin was seated in the saddle in an instant.

He doubled up the reins, and struck the horse sharply across the shoulders.

It was a thoroughbred animal, unused to blows, and it reared and plunged violently for several moments, then set off at a tremendous gallop.

The foremost of his hunters, though, were fairly in the Oxford-road before the horse started.

They set up a loud shout of anger and disappointment. To their surprise, as well as Turpin's, who happened just then to turn his head, ten or twelve officers who had been chasing him on foot swept round the corner well mounted.

They had passed some livery stables on their way, and from thence obtained the cattle. Their stoppage was what had caused Turpin to gain upon them as he did.

They were in full sight of their prey.

Very fortunate, indeed, was it for Turpin that he had been lucky enough to obtain possession of a horse. The odds now were, if anything, in his favour.

The officers came along at a good rate.

It was a beautiful steed upon which Turpin was mounted, though of course very inferior to his own mare, and was, no doubt, highly prized by its owner.

He made his way due west.

At length, after a gallop of about four miles, Turpin

reined up his steed upon the brow of a hill, and looked behind him.

The mounted police were just at its base, and good as was the speed he had made, he had not apparently gained a dozen yards upon them.

"The fellows must have got hold of some first-rate cattle; this one seems already to show signs of distress. Oh! for my own mare, Black Bess! Were she beneath me, I would laugh at all their efforts."

While speaking he had urged his horse to fresh exertion.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK IS A WITNESS TO A VERY SINGULAR SCENE IN THE OLD COUNTRY CHURCH

THICK black clouds had hitherto wholly hidden the moon's face, but now through a large straggling rift she looked down upon the earth.

"Confound it!" said Turpin, as the bright rays fell upon his countenance. "I could have done very well without any more light. Now they will be able to see me a mile off."

The road was very straight; indeed, it must have been remarked by many, what a great distance it goes without making a bend either to the right or the left, so there was little or no exaggeration in Turpin's words, when he said the officers would be able to see him a mile off.

"I must get out of this, that's certain," he added. "Let me see; a little further on I shall come to what I call the Dark-lane, for want of a better name, and down that I will take my way. Ah! here it is!"

Even while he spoke, Turpin found he had arrived opposite the entrance of the lane, and he turned down it like a shot, disappearing from the gaze of the officers with a suddenness that must have appeared to them almost magical.

Turpin had very appropriately designated this lane by the adjective dark, for the trees on both sides grew to such a great height, and so very thickly together, that scarcely a ray of light of any description penetrated through them, and it seemed more like riding into a cave than aught else.

Turpin dashed onwards without suffering his horse to relax its speed in the least.

A few minutes when a horse is at full gallop will carry a rider over a great deal of ground, so in a very short time Turpin emerged from this lane into the high road again.

He could not see them, but he could hear the clatter of his pursuers' footsteps.

"Now for it," said Turpin. "I can't get clear by riding, so I will give them the slip. Ah! now that will do first-rate! Capital!"

He flung himself off his horse as he spoke.

He took the reins and tucked them tightly under the front of the saddle, then with the palm of his hand struck the horse a smart blow on the flank, which caused the high-mettled creature to gallop swiftly along the road.

Turpin passed over to the other side, and crawled through a gap in the hedge.

He found himself in a meadow, on the west side of which, over another hedge, was an old country church.

A loud shout, and apparently of gratification, let him know that the officers had reached the road.

"What can they be so pleased about, I wonder?" asked Turpin. "I will take a peep, through the hedge."

He did so, and was so astonished at what he saw that he almost betrayed his place of concealment by an exclamation.

The officers were standing in a throng near the end of the lane, looking attentively at something.

Turpin followed the direction of their eyes, and saw, for the second time, that spectral resemblance of himself.

The officers saw it, too; so it was clear there was no delusion about the matter; or rather, if there was, they were subject to it as well as himself.

The figure was standing in the middle of the highway, at about half a mile distant, looking back over his shoulder at the officers, and seemingly in such an attitude as to be able to start so soon as any symptom of motion showed itself upon their part.

Turpin was bewildered, and he looked first from the officers and then to his second self.

"What, oh! what can it be?" he asked. "What am

I to think of this strange assumption of my own form! It would be perfect madness, or I would, as I resolved, rush forward and solve this mystery. Now I am compelled to inanition!"

By mutual consent, both parties seemed to have come to a halt for the purpose of resting their steeds, and so long as that distance was preserved between them neither could obtain the advantage of the other.

Turpin was full of curiosity and wonder to know what would happen next.

Suddenly the chief of the police uttered a few words to his companions, and then the whole of the troop, clapping spurs to their horses' sides, sped quickly down the lane.

The spectre horseman, and whom they no doubt believed was Turpin himself, was not apparently at all disconcerted at this proceeding on the part of the officers, for he, too, gave the reins to his horse, and set off at full speed.

The officers gave a loud shout, as they commenced an immediate pursuit.

"This grows stranger, and more and more incomprehensible," said Turpin, as he rose from his recumbent position in the meadow. "Who can this mysterious being be who so closely simulates my form and dress, for that it is anything supernatural I resolutely disbelieve, and will do, yet the whole affair is most perplexing and mysterious. It is quite evident, though, that the officers are labouring under the impression that it is me. So far it is very good, since I have an opportunity of escape which I should not have had under other circumstances. Until, however, I find it out, I am quite certain I shall know no peace. I feel exceedingly desirous to know how the chase is getting on, and whether they have caught my double. Is there a tree anywhere I can climb? No!"

He looked all round as he spoke, but no tree of any magnitude, or from which anything like a view could be obtained, was in sight.

"Stop now," he added, as his eye fell upon the old church to which we have alluded. "Stop, now. That church seems to have a tolerably high spire. Now if I could only get up that I should see for miles round, first-rate."

No sooner did this thought enter his mind, than he hastened across the meadow to put it into execution. He soon reached the hedge, which he surmounted, and then rolled down a grassy bank into a very narrow, but picturesque-looking lane.

He was on his feet in a moment.

"Who'd have thought, now," he said, "that I was going to miss my footing in that manner? Never mind, it's all right. I suppose this narrow path leads to the church?"

Turpin was right enough in this supposition, and in a few minutes he reached the entrance to the graveyard.

As is often the case in country places, there was a right of road through the churchyard, so Turpin had no other trouble in entering than that of pushing through a turnstile.

He hurried up the broad, smooth, gravel path, and ascending a short flight of stone steps, stood beneath the porch.

A door was facing him, which he naturally enough supposed led into the church, and there was another on his right, which was, beyond a doubt, the one he wanted, namely, that leading to the belfry.

The almost full moon lent him sufficient light to make an examination of the door. It was fastened, but that was a circumstance of no importance, for it creaked open in a moment under the application of Turpin's finger.

The blackness and silence of the tomb were before him. Dimly though he could see by the faint light that straggled into the place a circular flight of steps.

He pulled the door after him, and, as it dragged a little on its hinges, it remained close shut, and he had looked at it from the other side no one would have dreamt it had been forcibly broken open.

There were loopholes in the stonework of the staircase at regular intervals, and through these the moon's rays shone with an exceedingly beautiful effect.

Dick peeped through one or two of these on his way up the stairs, but the view through so narrow an aperture was too circumscribed for his purpose.

In less time than would have been believed, considering the strangeness and darkness of the place, Turpin reached the top of the steps, and withdrawing a large rusty key

pushed open a trap-door just over his head, after passing through which he found himself standing on the square, leaden roof of the church tower.

The beautiful prospect of many a mile of moonlit country would have been quite sufficient to recompense anyone for the trouble of the ascent, and Dick looked around him with deep pleasure.

The perfect silence and repose that everywhere prevailed lent, too, a great charm to the scene.

Dick scanned the whole of the horizon with his keen eyes, but no traces either of pursuer or pursued were visible.

The broad, high road could be defined with great distinctness as it wound about as sinuously as a river, and as the earth in it was of a whitish colour, it looked like a band of silver winding among the bright green trees.

Turpin made a lengthened examination of all the landscape, but still being unable to see what he sought, prepared to descend again.

Yet he lingered upon the roof-tower of the old church; he knew not why he did so, unless it was the extreme beauty of the scene, to which no words of ours could do adequate justice.

Presently there came upon his ears a faint muffled sound, and placing one hand upon the stone battlement, he leaned forward in order to hear the sound better.

It gradually increased in loudness.

"Horsemen!" said Turpin, "that's certain, and going at a tremendous pace, too. It must be the officers. Surely they will be in sight directly."

The faint, muffled sound grew plainer and plainer, until the clattering of horses' hoofs could be heard.

Just over the tall edgerows, but at a considerable distance, Dick could see a number of riders' hats gliding rapidly along.

"There they are—there they are!" exclaimed Dick, greatly excited; "why, they are coming back! Have they caught him, I wonder, and made him a prisoner?"

The horsemen had now, within a short distance, reached a bend in the road, after turning which they would be in full sight of Dick.

"It won't do to stand up like this," he said, "for some officious personage is sure to see me. I must be quite a conspicuous object up here!"

There was in reality no ground for apprehension, for Dick, when he spoke, quite forgot the height to which he had ascended. Still, he crouched low down on the roof, and peeped over the stonework anxiously.

He found his view was not in the least impeded, and he had the gratification of seeing a horseman sweep round the corner and come at a rapid pace along the road.

Although he was quite prepared, Dick could not help feeling a little agitated when this horseman came in sight.

His resemblance to himself was perfect.

He came along the road at a rapid pace.

In another moment the officers came round the bend, and catching sight of the flying horseman, with many gesticulations urged forward by whip and spur their almost exhausted cattle.

The interest with which Dick regarded them was most intense.

"I can't understand," he muttered, "how they have turned back and preserved the same positions, unless my personator has ridden bodily through them, and I should hardly think he would be foolishly enough to do that. It is a thing I should think about twice before I did!"

He lost sight of them all at this juncture, as the road took another sudden turn, but he knew in a moment or two they must reach that part of it which passed by the church, and which for a distance of half a mile or more each way was in nearly a straight line, while from his elevated position he would be able to see over the hedgerows on each side of the lane.

Dick's double, for so in his mind he called him, very quickly made his appearance.

"He is gaining on them!" said Turpin, a tone of satisfaction in spite of himself tingling his voice. "He will soon distance them completely."

The officers now came in view.

Their horses seemed all but knocked up.

It was a most exciting race to Turpin, and he watched it with as much interest as folks do the Derby when they have some very heavy bets depending on the issue of it.

He forgot all about the caution which had induced him

to crouch down behind the coping, but rose to his feet and waved his arms, almost uttering a shout in his excitement.

He became conscious of the risk he had run by seeing one of the officers in the road below turn round and point to the tower.

Turpin dropped down like a shot.

Still he ventured to look over. The man was evidently from his manner saying something very earnestly to his companions.

"Confound the fellow," said Turpin, as he looked at him. "I wonder now whether he saw me. What a fool I must have been to have stood up in that absurd fashion!"

It would appear that what the officer said was simply relative to the edifice itself, for the whole of them turned round in their saddles and gazed at it, but they did not slacken speed while doing so.

Five minutes more and they were out of sight.

Turpin turned away.

"I can't make it out," he said, as he felt his way down the steps; "can't make it out at all. Who can this man be who bears so remarkable a resemblance to myself, and dresses so much the same. I must wait patiently, I suppose. The mystery will be cleared up some day. It must unquestionably have been he I saw when mounted in the lane, only my excited fancy just then magnified him into a spectre!"

This was a very probable supposition, but whether it was a correct one time only can determine.

Turpin groped its way down the belfry stairs, and reached the bottom in what seemed to him to be an incredibly short time. However, there, by the faint light of the moon through a loophole above, he could see the door plain enough.

He pushed it open.

Instead, however, of passing into the porch as he expected, he found this door opened into the gallery of the church.

The interior, in contrast with the dark belfry staircase, was quite bathed in light, and a vague undefined feeling of curiosity caused Turpin to pass through this door, and after walking to the edge of the gallery he sat down upon one of the front seats and looked below him.

He happened to be facing the large stained glass window over the altar, and through this the moon's rays streamed with full force, lighting up all the body of the church, and leaving the remainder in deep shadow.

Scarcely even in the many scenes which he, in the course of a long career, had met with, had he found one so imposing as this. A rapid repose, such as can exist only in a sacred edifice, everywhere prevailed; and unconsciously and despite himself strange and solemn feelings filled his breast—feelings of whose existence he had hitherto been in ignorance.

It might be that he sat five minutes, or even ten, leaning his head upon his hands, and his elbow on the railing of the gallery, with his eyes fixed upon the beautiful stained window, and his mind abstracted from all things present, when a slight rattling sound made itself heard, and immediately recalled his energies.

He started like one suddenly awakened.

The rattling noise continued, and he listened in a vain endeavour to make out what it was.

In that old silent church it came upon the hearing clearly, though probably elsewhere it would have been unnoticed.

Although somewhat startled by the circumstance, Dick retained sufficient presence of mind to remain perfectly still.

In another instant he heard a sharp click, which was followed by a grating noise.

Then he heard a voice.

"Confound the old door!" said some one. "What a trouble I had to open it, to be sure! I must have that keyhole seen to to-morrow; it kept jumping about in a very improper manner! It must be bewitched! However, I knew it would have to yield to me in the end; me, Solomon Gogga, as has been beadle and sexton here a matter of forty years! That's why I had patience—I—I knew very well, when it kept bobbing about so, that if I took a careful aim the key would sure to go in, and so it did. Hold up!"

The speaker blundered against something in his path.

The words, however, which he had uttered, made things quite intelligible to Turpin.

It was the rattling of the key in the lock that had disturbed the highwayman's ruminations, and the thick tones in which the old man had spoken, and who had named himself Solomon Goggs, proclaimed pretty loudly that he was some distance gone in intoxication.

What was his motive for paying a visit to the church at so unusual an hour he had yet to learn, so Turpin remained quite quiet, and listened for him to speak again.

As he fully anticipated, he had not long to wait, for Mr. Solomon Goggs, beadle and sexton, had reached that point in his potations at which extreme consciousness began.

"Oh! I see now! It's one of the benches belonging to the free seats. Confound the free seats! There had no business to be such things in the church, leastwise of all, down stairs. To be sure, they're close to the door! I should like to know who it was pulled the bench out. Some of the low-minded mobocracy sort of people. It's just like their imperance, making me break my shins again! Come up, will you!"

The last words, apparently, were addressed to the bench against which he had stumbled, and which might be supposed to have been somewhat refractory, for the words were followed by a rumbling, creaking sound, which echoed and re-echoed through the building.

"That's right at last! What a night of adventures, to be sure! It's infernally disagreeable to have to come here—infernally disagreeable. I am well paid though, so I ought not to grumble! Still I am always aggravated when I have to leave pleasant company at the 'Well of Content!' The sooner this job's over the better, and then I shall stand a chance of getting back again before they have all gone!"

Thus speaking, the old man, in a nervous, uncertain kind of way, made his way along the aisle of the church.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN UNRAVELLED TO DICK'S UNQUALIFIED SATISFACTION.

A FEELING OF mingled curiosity and interest to know what errand it was that at that unusual hour brought Mr. Solomon Goggs to the church took possession of Turpin's mind, and he waited very patiently to find out what it was.

Judging, however, that if he occupied his present position in front of the organ he would run a great risk of being discovered, he took the opportunity, while Mr. Goggs was busily moving the bench, and talking to himself, to step round to the right-hand side of the gallery, which happened to be shrouded in deep shadow, for the moon was not shining quite straight into the church, but rather obliquely; consequently, one side of the gallery was quite light, while the other was in darkness that seemed all the greater by the contrast it presented to the other. Here Turpin felt he was secure from discovery by any chance observation.

"How uncommonly bright the moon shines," continued Mr. Goggs, who was now not far from the chancel; "uncommonly bright it shines. Ha! ha! that's a good line—a musical line—ha! ha! Uncommonly bright, uncommonly bright, uncommonly bright it shines!"

Mr. Goggs, the beadle, chaunted the words to the tune of some pothouse ditty with which he was doubtless familiar. He ended with quite a loud "shines," which, in the stillness of the church, he considered came with a capital effect.

"Bravo! now, there's a stave! I wonder where any one else is to be found, of my time of life, who could come that sort of thing. Uncom—uncom—uncommonly bright it shines! I am decidedly in voice to-night, and that makes the shame all the greater that I should have to leave my friends."

"He seems a nice sort of article," said Turpin, to himself. "I must certainly wait until I know what he is going to do. I have a presentiment that it will be something worth hearing. Hark!"

Mr. Solomon Goggs was speaking again.

"What's the good, too, I should like to know, of sending me here on such a bright night as this to light up the church? No good at all. No one would be able to

see them, the moon shines so. I suppose, as it's no sort of concern of mine, I may as well light them."

With a tremulous hand, Mr. Goggs began to light, with a lamp which he carried with him, a number of tall wax candles on the altar. As he said, it did seem useless to light them, for the rays of the moon quenched them utterly.

It took Mr. Goggs some time to accomplish his task, and he kept muttering and grumbling all the while.

"I have no patience with such humbug, not I; why the deuce could not they come at a respectable hour, and not when the church ought to be left entirely to—ahem! those individuals who live underneath it!"

"Hang it! why don't he say what it is that has brought him here?" said Turpin, impatiently, "and not keep gabbling like that. I suppose if I want to gratify my curiosity I must wait."

"There, now," said Mr. Goggs, with an air of satisfaction, as the last candle took light,—"there now, that's all right, and I suppose they will be here directly, and I shall just have the place ready when they come."

Mr. Goggs now proceeded to dust and arrange some cushions, and this job seemed to require all his breath, for he did not utter a word while he was doing it.

"Ah!" he sighed, as he rose up and straightened his back, "that's done. It kill's me a'most to knock them cushions about. I'll take a walk down to the door and see if they are on their way."

"The deuce take it!" said Turpin, as the beadle tottered down the aisle, "why don't he say who's coming? I almost fancy, from his preparations, it's only going to be a marriage, and yet who can it be at this hour in this out-of-the-way place? There's something mysterious in it, that's certain, and I will stay to see it out."

At this moment, Mr. Goggs opened the church-door to have a look out, and, as soon as he did so, the grating of carriage-wheels reached Turpin's ears.

He leaned over the balcony of the gallery and tried to see who was coming. He was unable to account for the intense curiosity he felt.

The grating of the wheels ceased.

Then there was a murmur of voices, and a party of five immediately entered the church.

The first who made his way up the aisle was attired in clerical robes, and, by the pure light which streamed in, Turpin could perceive he possessed a remarkable, oily-looking countenance, and a portly body to correspond.

Next came two persons, and these, in a moment, riveted the whole of his attention.

They were male and female.

The former was a fair-haired, good-enough-looking young man, though many would have been displeased with several traits in his physiognomy if they had been considered apart; but in their entirety they would, by any but a very keen observer, have been passed over unnoticed.

He was bareheaded, so Dick had a good opportunity of studying his features; not, however, that he did so particularly, for he had recognised him at the first glance.

It was the afterwards Earl of Bristol, though at that time the chances of his succeeding to the title were very remote, and he was known only as the Honourable Mr. Hervey.

With an increasing interest, Turpin turned his gaze upon the fair companion at his side, but she was shrouded from head to foot in a rich white lace veil, so he was unable to see her countenance.

From her form and carriage there could not be the slightest doubt that she was both young and beautiful.

Behind them, again, were two females, one of whom walked a step or two in advance of the other, as if to show, even in God's temple, where all should surely be alike, that she who followed was an inferior.

Neither of these were known to Turpin.

The rear was brought up by Mr. Solomon Goggs, the beadle, who seemed to have shaken off a great deal of his intoxication, for he walked along in a very pompous manner indeed.

The minister opened the little gate in the iron railings in front of the communion-table, and stepped into the enclosure.

The Hon. Mr. Hervey and his companion knelt down on the cushions, which had nearly broken the backs of Mr. Goggs to dust and discomfiture.

The two females stood a little on one side, and spoke together in a whisper.

Mr. Goggs, from some safe corner where he had placed it, took a long black staff, with a formidable gilt affair on the top, with the sight whereof on a Sunday morning he was wont to strike terror to the souls of the Charity children in the back seats in the gallery.

"It's going to be a marriage," thought Turpin, "that's evident enough. But what in the world can be Mr. Hervey's motive for coming here in the dead of night to be married? There's something wrong going on, I know! I wish I could see the bride's face!"

Never did a wish meet with a speedier gratification than this did; for no sooner were the words out of his mouth than the prospective bride raised her hands, and threw the large white veil off her face.

A very beautiful countenance was then revealed. Full of gaiety and sparkling vivacity it doubtless, from its configuration, generally was, but now the cheeks were wet with tears.

But if Turpin's surprise was great upon seeing Mr. Hervey, it was a thousand times increased when the bright moonbeams fell upon this fair face. He recognised it instantly, for he had seen it many times, and it had never failed to call forth his greatest admiration.

Her name sprang involuntarily to his lips.

"Elizabeth Chudleigh!"

This extraordinary woman, who was afterwards so notorious as the Duchess of Kingston, was at this time occupying the position of maid of honour to the Princess of Wales—the mother of George III.—and had already, by her levity and intrigues, created an unenviable reputation.

But that she should be thus about to pledge herself to the gentleman by her side filled Turpin with astonishment, for popular rumour said she was betrothed to the Duke of Devonshire, who was then travelling on the continent.

His speculations were interrupted by the minister commencing the ceremony.

As it proceeded the maid of honour became violently agitated, and she who stood behind her with the domestic stepped forward, and, placing her hand upon her shoulder, whispered a few words in her ear.

She shuddered, and became calm.

In thick, unctuous tones, the minister went on reading the service.

At length he came to that portion where the bridegroom has to place the wedding-ring upon the finger of the bride. She refused to hold out her hand.

A look of the greatest conceivable vexation crossed Mr. Hervey's face, and, seizing her by the wrist, he forced the ring upon her finger.

The clergyman pretended to take no notice of the circumstance.

Again a few words were spoken to the bride by the female, who possessed apparently much power over her, but this time in a louder tone.

Dick strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, but he could not catch their import.

They appeared, however, to have their due effect, for the maid of honour—now in name only—ceased her struggles, and resigned herself to her fate.

The ceremony was completed, and the bride and bridegroom rose to their feet.

The former was very pale.

"What secret agency," asked Dick of himself, "can be at work? What power is it that woman possesses to cause this girl to do that which I am certain her heart does not approve? She loathes this man! I can see it in her countenance! However, I cannot interfere, and, even if I could, it is now too late!"

Mr. Hervey took the hand of his young bride, and, having kissed it, placed it beneath his arm.

The whole party then proceeded, headed by the beadle and his staff, to the vestry of the church, the door of which, as soon as they had passed through it, closed after them with a bang.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DICK SETS OUT FOR LONDON IN SEARCH OF BLACK BESS, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HIS LIFE.

"Now this," said Dick, as he rose from his seat and

gave himself a good shake; "now this is a little affair which, although there does not seem to be an opportunity at the present, I shall try my best to unravel. It has in it every element of the mysterious; besides which, I feel a very warm interest in this young wife, and it will go hard if we do not become better acquainted than we are at present. Who knows my unsuspected presence at this secret marriage? and my being a witness of it may be a circumstance that will, perhaps, some day turn out to my advantage?"

By the time Turpin had finished these reflections the vestry door was opened, and the little party again made their way into the church.

They did not pause, however, but went straight to the entrance and departed.

The clergyman and the beadle remained upon the threshold.

Turpin heard the grating of the wheels of the vehicles along the gravelled avenue.

"They're gone," said Mr. Goggs.

"Sir?" said the parson, "did my hearing deceive me, or were those words addressed to me?"

"I humbly begs your honour's worship's pardon, sir," replied Mr. Goggs, in a cringing tone. "Very humbly begs it."

The parson put on an air of importance.

"You should bear in mind, Mr. Goggs," he said, pompously, "that there is a certain amount of proper deference due from you to me."

"I humbly is aware of that, your worship. I merely ventured to remark, or rather to make the observation, that our late honoured and respected bridal party had gone."

"It was a piece of unwarrantable presumption upon your part, Mr. Goggs."

"Oh! your worship!"

"A man, Mr. Goggs, who has filled under me the posts or duties of beadle and sexton for so many years as you have ought to know better than make such a disrespectful assertion!"

"Yes, your worship."

"You should never assert anything to me as a fact, Mr. Goggs, if you are ever so assured of it; but you may venture, in a proper sort of way, to mildly suggest anything to me, but nothing more!"

"Very good, your worship."

"Now put out the candles, Mr. Goggs, and then lock up the church."

"I will, your honour's most respectful worship. Good-night, your worship!"

"Good-night, Goggs! good-night!"

"Him be hanged!" growled the beadle, as he turned and came up the aisle. "Good-night, Goggs!" forsooth! Why don't he set me the example of being so good—respectful?"

"That's just what I should like to know, old fellow!" said Turpin, as he leaned over the gallery, and looked with a quizzical expression into the face of Mr. Goggs.

We really wish we could convey a proper idea of the look of blank astonishment that overspread the beadle's face as the unexpected sound of a human voice fell upon his ear. He glared all round with wide open mouth and eyes.

"Don't be afraid: it's all right!" said Turpin.

As he spoke he got upon the edge of the gallery, and jumped into the pulpit, which was but a foot or two below him.

"The devil! the devil!" screamed Mr. Goggs, in an agony of fear. "Help! help! Murder! murder!"

In some inexplicable way he seemed to roll down the aisle, and out of the front door of the church in a moment.

Turpin roared with laughter as he descended the pulpit stairs.

When he reached the door the beadle was quite out of sight.

"I fancy I have disturbed his nervous system a little, and given him a fright that he won't get over yet a bit. I shouldn't wonder, though, if he don't arouse some one and come back, so I had better make myself scarce."

Turpin sauntered down the gravel path towards the turnstile.

He paused for a moment with his hand upon one of its crossbars.

"How am I to get Bess?" he asked himself.

could not help it, and yet I wish I had not left her behind. I suppose the only thing I can do is to make my way back to London with the least possible delay, and in the best way I can."

No living moving thing was in sight as he directed his steps down the green leafy lane into the high road.

"It surely must be nearly daybreak," said Turpin, as he looked up at the sky, "and yet I see no light in the east. I suppose it is because the moon shines so brilliantly."

He walked rapidly along the highway in the direction of London, and after proceeding rather more than a mile saw something which filled him with pleasure.

It was a waggon, drawn by a team of horses, creeping slowly up a hill.

"That's the ticket," said Turpin, as he changed his walk to a run. "I will try if I cannot ride the rest of the way to town."

Turpin gained very rapidly upon the waggon, and overtook it just as the driver came to a halt about half way up the hill.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE OFFICERS SURROUND THE MARKET WAGGON,
AND MAKE TURPIN A PRISONER.

"Hoy!" shouted Turpin.

"Well, what now?" asked the driver, who seemed only partially awake.

"You're on your way to London, ain't you?"

"What if I be?"

"Don't be surly—I know you are. I want you to give me a lift."

The man roused up a little on hearing this, and from his very high seat looked down curiously upon Turpin.

"I don't mind if I do give you a lift," he said, after a few minutes' observation.

"All right."

"That is," he added, "if you don't mind riding a-top of the carrots and turnips, and standing some beer as soon as we reach the 'Red Cow' at Acton."

"With all my heart. How far is it?"

"Well, maybe it's a matter of four miles."

"No more?"

"No. Climb up, I mon't wait."

With a little difficulty Turpin climbed up on to the top of the waggon. It was one of those huge, clumsy conveyances, drawn by five powerful horses, which, by an early riser, are still to be seen crawling every morning into Covent-garden market.

Turpin found himself on a not very soft place to sit down upon, and about fourteen feet from the ground.

As soon as he had settled himself a little the driver addressed some words to his horses in a language which was quite unintelligible to Turpin, but apparently not so to the horses, for they shook their heads, causing the bells on their harness to tinkle, and began to descend the hill.

Turpin soon found his most comfortable position was a recumbent one, so he adopted it, resting his head on his elbow.

"You are out uncommonly early," he said to the countryman, for Turpin was one who could never remain in anybody's company long without beginning a conversation of some sort. "Have you come far?"

"Just t'other side Uxbridge; that's all."

"Going to market, I suppose?"

"I be."

"What time is it?"

"Not much arter three. Kim up!"

"Three! Is it possible you get to market so early? You must start overmorn."

"I be very late this morning. I shall be one o' the last in. Some'll have been there four hours before me."

"Indeed!"

"Them as comes fust gets rid o' their load fust, and gets the best price for it."

"Oh! that's it, is it?"

"Yes, it be."

"So you all try how soon you can get there?"

"We does."

"Then how is it you are so late this morning?"

"Why you see, it was through a accident. There's a very narrow gate leading from our farm into the road, as is barely wide enough to let this waggon through."

Turpin could hardly help laughing at the idea of calling it a narrow gate that would allow such a monstrous four-wheeled affair to pass through; but the man was right enough: he spoke comparatively, and all things are big or little, wide or narrow, by comparison.

"Well, what then?" he asked.

"Why there was a brick end or summat lying in the way, and I was just guiding the team through the gate, when the darned thing turned the fore-wheel a bit aside, and bump against the post it went, and off came the hind one."

"That was a misfortune."

"But that ain't the worst part of it."

"No?"

"No. In consequence of the wheel coming off the waggon upset, and out came all the carrots and turnips. Warn't old Gripps just savagerous?"

"Who?"

"Old Gripps; that's my gaffer, and him as owns the farm."

"Oh, I see!"

"He came down like a roaring bull, and didn't he set on to I? But 'twarn't my fault, I couldn't help it."

"But you put matters all right?"

"Oh! yes; we put on a new wheel, and loaded the waggon again; but it took above five hours altogether."

"And you will lose the sale for a great deal of your stuff?"

"Oh! I don't know for that, but I sha'n't get such a good price as I ought."

In such rude talk as this Dick whiled away the time which otherwise would have passed very slowly, and he was quite surprised when the driver said:

"We're at Acton now, and yonder by the roadside you can see the truss of straw hanging outside the 'Red Cow.'"

"Oh! is that it? There seems a good many horees and men about."

"Yes, sure to be. Some'll be going to market, but more coming back, and we always stop for a little while both going and coming, so on market days they do a little trade."

"They must do."

As they approached the old inn, the bustle became greater and greater, and the road was quite choked up with vehicles.

The driver who had given Dick a lift was obliged to draw up fifty yards or so from the inn door.

"Now, my friend," said Turpin, as the man prepared to alight, "I don't want to come down and enter the inn with you, but here is half-a-crown, and you can get what you like for yourself."

"Thank your honour," he said, holding out his hand.

Turpin placed the coin within it.

The driver looked very closely and earnestly into Turpin's face as he did so, and then by the exercise of great gymnastic skill got down off his seat.

Dick laid still closer down upon the vegetables, for he by no means wished to court observation.

No thought of the danger which menaced him entered his mind, and as he laid down and looked up at the sky, he fell into a deep reverie.

We will return to the driver.

As soon as he found his feet touch the earth, he cast one anxious glance up at the top of his waggon, and then made his way as quickly as he could towards the "Red Cow."

His purpose he no doubt considered a vitally important one.

He had recognised Turpin, for he had once before had a good look at him as the highwayman stood at an inn door.

The first glance which he gave when Turpin asked for a lift, was sufficient to assure him of his identity, for the man possessed the by no means uncommon faculty of immediately recognising anyone he had once seen.

When, however, Turpin placed the money in his hand, their faces were close together, and he had an opportunity of scrutinizing Dick's closely, which confirmed him in his recognition. He was quite sure he was not mistaken.

There was a great number of people standing round the front door of the "Red Cow," drinking and making an early breakfast, and he was rather at a loss how to proceed.

He knew what a large amount was offered for Turpin a

apprehension—a fortune for a man of his position; and, of course, he naturally enough wished to obtain as large a share of it himself as he possibly could.

It was in this way the large rewards offered for the simple apprehension of a criminal in those days defeated their own object, for it made people think just as the driver of the market-waggon did.

At length, after some moments' cogitation, finding himself just as undecided as he was before, he resolved to take the landlord of the "Red Cow" into his confidence, and be guided by him as to what he ought to do.

He was impelled to this course by the conviction that he had no time to lose, for if he was absent many moments the highwayman's suspicions would be aroused, and then the large sum of money would slip through his fingers.

Like most of those persons who are slow to come to a decision, the driver was in a violent hurry to act upon it as soon as it was made, and he hastened down the passage towards the bar with the dread at his heart that he should be too late.

His spirits sank to zero when he saw the landlord wholly intent upon serving his customers, whom, however, he could not supply fast enough, for many were clamouring loudly for refreshment.

It did not require a second glance to show him the hopelessness of being able to ask the landlord's advice, so he was again thrown upon his own resources.

He was beginning to despair, when he noticed for the first time that among those who were standing at the bar were four or five London police-officers.

He considered their presence as something providential. With the manner of a perfect maniac, he made a rush at the police-officer who was nearest to him, and, seizing him by the collar, began to drag him along the passage of the inn.

The driver was a tall, robust fellow, strong enough to pick up an ox and carry it in his arms; so he had the police-officer, who happened to be the smallest of the lot, out into the yard in front of the inn in a twinkling.

The others set down their glasses, and followed them with wonder in their looks.

The driver was a little out of breath—not with exertion, but excitement; and when he had got the officer outside, he could not speak, but kept opening and shutting his mouth in a most extraordinary manner.

The officer felt convinced he was in the clutches of a madman, and he shouted for help.

The others sprang forward to his rescue.

"Reward!" gasped the driver.

The officers picked up their ears, and thought they had, perhaps, got hold of a good thing.

The one in command, and who was a purple-faced, apoplectic-looking man, with a temper as short as his neck, no sooner heard the driver pronounce the word "reward," than he seized him by the neck, and, in the strength which passion for a moment gave him, shook him to and fro.

"Speak out, you dolt!" he cried. "Make haste! What have you got to say?"

It was a fatal course to pursue, if he wished to elicit any information.

"Reward!" was all the countryman could utter, but he pointed in the direction of the waggon. As, however, there were at least a dozen standing about, the officers were not much wiser.

"Reward for what?" they cried, while the purple-faced man looked as though he meditated a second attack.

"Thousand pounds!" said the driver.

"Dick Turpin it is!" they exclaimed. "He has caught him, and wants the reward!"

The driver nodded his head rapidly.

He did not see the sly wink the officers gave their companions, or he would have sunk to the ground in dismay. It was so dreadfully expressive.

"Where is he? Show him to us, and you shall have the reward!"

"He's lying down on the top of my waggon o' turnips. Come along; I'll show him to you."

They obeyed with alacrity, and the officer with the purple face, as he passed the front door of the inn, shouted, as loud as he could—

"Let those who wish to earn five pounds in the next five minutes follow me!"

It was ludicrous to see with what haste those who were drinking put down their glasses and made a rush out of the door of the inn.

The bar was vacant in an instant.

Then, seeing the officers a few yards off running with all their might, they hurried after them as fast as their legs would carry them over the ground.

CHAPTER XX.

DICK TURPIN HAS A VERY UNCOMFORTABLE JOURNEY TO LONDON IN COMPANY WITH THE POLICE.

In the meantime, Turpin lay placidly enough on his rather hard bed of vegetables.

Strange to say, he felt perfectly secure, and no thought of danger entered his head for a moment.

His mind was filled with the image of the fair Elizabeth Chudleigh, whose marriage he had seen solemnized under such peculiar circumstances, and so much did the subject engross his attention, that the hubbub which had taken place in the inn-yard had failed to rouse him, and it was not until the officers actually reached the waggon that he was aware of the peril in which he was placed.

He recovered, though, in a moment the use of his thoughts and limbs, and he sprang to his feet instantly.

He saw at a glance he was taken, and that, unless something most miraculous occurred, there was not the slightest possibility of his making his escape.

"Give in, give in at once, Dick!" shouted the officer with the purple face. "It's all up with you! You're done as brown as a hammer! We mean to take you; alive, if we can—if not, why dead, of course!"

He very coolly cocked a pistol as he spoke, and presented it full at Turpin.

The highwayman's position could scarcely, by any possibility, have been worse than it was. Perched up fourteen feet from the ground, and on top of objects that would impede his descent, and surrounded on every side by foes—for those who had left their drink at the bar in obedience to the police-officer's summons had placed themselves all round in a circle—all retreat was absolutely out off; for, though these men were not armed, yet, as soon as he began to descend by the waggon, their numbers were so great, that they would have closed round him and overpowered him immediately.

Situated, too, as he was, he had no means of making an effective attack upon his foes.

"Come down, Turpin!" said the purple-faced officer again. "Come down, my boy, and give in handsomely! It's no good you getting up a row! You have led me a nice dance to-night, and how you came to be on top of this waggon I can't conceive, for I chased you as far as this in the direction of London."

Turpin smiled. It was, doubtless, his double to whom he alluded.

Still he showed no signs of complying with the officer's very polite request, who began, therefore, to grow more purple than usual in the face as his impatience increased.

"Up with you!" he shouted to his men. "Climb up on the waggon and make him your prisoner, since he's fool enough not to come down!"

With a readiness and courage which certainly did them credit, the officers sprang forward at the word, and began to climb up the ropes by which the vegetables were secured to the waggon, in a very reckless manner.

Turpin's position was getting critical.

He looked about among the turnips in the hope of finding a pitchfork, which, of course, in the hands of a desperate man, would be a most dangerous weapon, but there was not one.

In fact, there was nothing whatever on the top, with the exception of two beams of wood, the use of which he could not conjecture, but these were too heavy for him to wield.

The heads of the officers just appeared above the bunches of turnips.

"This will never do," said Dick. "Ah! why didn't I think of that before?"

The waggon was a trifle nearer one side of the road than the other, and over the hedgerow Dick could see an extensive meadow.

If it had been soil, it would have been risking life and limb to have jumped it, but he noticed that just on the other side of the hedge a quantity of loose rubbish had



[TURPIN SWEARS FRIENDSHIP WITH TOM KING.]

been heaped up, doubtless for the purpose of burning, and when he saw this the idea occurred to him of jumping from the top of the waggon upon it and then trusting to his luck.

Just as the first officer crawled on to the top of the waggon, Dick gave a spring, and in an instant alighted on the heap of rubbish.

The shock was very great, and Turpin felt as if all the breath had been suddenly knocked out of his body, and he was a moment or so before he could rise.

That brief interval of time was fatal to him.

The officer was, of course, much surprised to see Turpin make such a flying leap, but with praiseworthy bravery he followed his example.

Turpin was just getting up, when he was prostrated again with great violence by this officer falling upon him.

The concussion almost deprived him of consciousness, but he still retained sufficient of his senses to feel himself clutched round the throat by no gentle hand.

Then a desperate struggle ensued.

The odds were fearfully against Turpin, but he fought bravely.

In a moment or two, and before he could free himself from his foe, the other officers and the market-waggoners had run a little way down the road, and climbed over a gate, and were making towards him at full speed.

They cast themselves bodily upon the combatants.

The officer with the remarkable purple visage was overjoyed, and he danced about in a most extraordinary manner in token of his satisfaction.

"Hurrah! Bravo! Nabbed at last! I knew I should have him! A thousand pounds, too! What a glorious sum! Pity it's got to be shared amongst so many!"

A cloud obscured the sunshine of his joy as this reflection crossed him, and he ceased his triumphal dance abruptly.

He began to rack his brain to devise some scheme for appropriating to himself the greatest part of the money.

Bleeding, bruised, and exhausted, Turpin was raised to a standing posture.

A dozen hands grasped each of his arms, and a pair of handcuffs were locked upon his wrists.

The redoubtable highwayman was a prisoner.

He was judged, however, to be not sufficiently secure, so a piece of strong cord was passed through his elbows, and then drawn tight behind him.

The position of his arms thus pinioned gave him intolerable pain, but he scorned either by word or gesture to make his captors aware of the fact.

The probability is, if he had, that any remonstrance from him on such a subject would meet with nothing but derision.

He was deprived of all means of effectual resistance, so, instead of further exhausting himself, and furnishing his foes with a pretext for additional ill-usage, he to all appearance quietly resigned himself to his fate.

We have said to all appearance, for though he was outwardly calm, his heart was burning against the waggoner who had so treacherously betrayed him.

Those who had succeeded in capturing him stood round in a dense crowd.

"Bring him along!" said the chief officer. "Bring him along! He shall be found in lodgings for a few days!"

As he spoke he led the way across the field, through the gate along the road, and to the "Red Cow" inn.

He was followed by his well-escorted prisoner.

All halted when they reached the inn yard.

"Fetch out the horses, Perkins," cried the chief officer. "They are already saddled and bridled, so look sharp!"

"All right, sir," said Perkins, as he disappeared into the stables.

The treacherous waggoner kept close to Dick. In his eyes he was the representative of so many guineas, and he was unwilling to trust him out of his sight.

One of the officers drew near to his chief, and spoke to him in a whisper.

"Mr. Wriggles," he said. "Mr. Wriggles."

"Well, Instone, what is it? Speak low."

This was said in quite a condescending way, so the officer who had been named Instone felt emboldened in what he was going to say.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mr. Wriggles, but I don't like the idea of having to share the reward with all these country bumpkins!"

"Especially after the trouble we had in the kitchen at St. Giles's, and riding for hours all over the country."

"The idea is outrageous in the extreme, in my humble opinion, Mr. Wriggles."

"And mine, too, Instone."

"Well, sir, I wanted to ask you if we couldn't get out of it in some way?"

"I should like, but I don't see how it's to be done."

"Nor I! And yet?"

"Can't you suggest anything?"

"Well, no, without we fobbed them off with a promise, and then crept out of performing it in the best way we could."

"If nothing better can be thought of, we must do that. The greater part of them, if not all, have been up to London, and are on their way home, so we shall not have very much trouble with them; but, as for this waggoner who put us down on the job, why he appears to be going to London with his load, and if so we shall have a bother to do him."

"So I think, Mr. Wriggles. Just look how he watches Dick. Talk of a cat watching a mouse, why it's nothing to it."

"Nothing, as you say. Oh! here comes Perkins."

As he spoke Perkins and the ostler came out of the stable with five horses ready equipped for the road.

The poor animals, though, looked dreadfully fatigued, and it was quite evident the officers' journey to London would not be a very rapid one.

"Now, Perkins!" shouted Mr. Wriggles. "Make haste, you've been a long while fetching them."

"I know that, but I couldn't help it. The poor 'osses is so tired, I could not persuade them to get up now."

"Never mind! Mount! You, Instone, take the prisoner behind you. Your horse must carry double for a bit, and then we will change, and take it in turns all the way."

"Very good, sir."

Dick Turpin was raised and seated in the saddle.

Already had a plan of escape matured itself in his mind, and any resistance just then would only have had the effect of destroying it, so he suffered them to do with him as they pleased.

The men, however, were evidently prepared for a desperate struggle, and were somewhat surprised at the tameness with which he submitted to his fate.

Mr. Wriggles was well pleased to observe it, for he had rather an exaggerated idea of Dick's powers of mischief, but he did not attribute the highwayman's quiet behaviour to its real cause.

"My friends," he said to the people in the inn-yard, as he got on the back of his own steed and took his place at the head of the little cavalcade, "I promise! those who assisted me five pounds a-piece for doing so."

"You did—you did!" they cried, crowding eagerly around him.

"Well, I spoke on behalf of the Secretary of State. Of course, I have not the hundred pounds or so that would be required to satisfy you in my possession now, but if you will call on the Secretary of State any morning at ten o'clock the money will be paid."

There was a look of blank disappointment upon the faces of those who, for purely mercenary motives, were so ready to lend their aid to capture Turpin. None of them seemed to like the idea of waiting upon the Secretary of State.

Murmurs of dissatisfaction arose.

"It's no good grumbling at me, my friends," said Mr. Wriggles. "You were in duty bound, without the offer of money, to lend your assistance towards making this man a prisoner, and all I have got to say is, that those who do not like to go to the Secretary of State for their five pounds must go without having them."

Turpin had scarcely anticipated this, and it, to some extent, disturbed the plans he had already made; but of course he could not let so favourable an opportunity go by without making an effort to turn it to his advantage.

He turned towards the people, and spoke rapidly:

"It's all humbug what he has been telling you. Don't believe it. He has no authority to make such a statement respecting the Secretary of State, and you would only get laughed at by the officials if you went there on such an errand. The officers here want to do you out of your share of the reward and pocket it all themselves. Set upon them; they deserve it for their duplicity. Free me from them, and I will give you every one not five pounds each, but ten, and that upon the spot. Now then, what do you say? Dick Turpin was never yet known to break his word. Set me free!"

Absolute passion prevented Mr. Wriggles from interrupting Dick in making this speech. He tried to give some orders to his men, but his mouth only opened, while his countenance changed from red to purple, and then from purple to black.

He was in imminent danger of strangulation when Dick finished, but then he recovered his voice.

"Gag him! knock him down! kill him!" he shrieked. "Don't let him utter another word!"

Dick just had time to say—

"Set me free, friends all, and I will keep my word," when a twisted handkerchief was thrown across his mouth and tied tightly at the back of his head.

"Hear, hear!" shouted several of the throng. "Set him free! set him free! We can trust to his word, but we can't to the officers'. They have deceived us already. Down with them!"

The whole of the crowd seemed to be unanimous upon this point, for, while these words were yet upon their lips, they made a rush upon the officers, who were scarcely prepared to resist them.

The numbers of their opponents were four to one, and, though they were armed and mounted, they stood but a poor chance.

Dick felt himself seized and dragged off his horse in a moment, and the gag removed from his mouth.

"Cut the cord behind me!" he cried, as he found his feet touch the ground, and then I will assist you."

It was done instantly.

Then there were the handcuffs, which he had forgotten; but by this time the whole of the officers had been pulled off their horses, and were held firmly upon the ground.

The victory was complete.

It was an easy-enough matter to take a key out of one of their pockets and unlock the handcuffs. Dick was once more a free man.

"Thanks for your service, my friends!" he shouted; "I will keep my word; you shall have the money I have promised, and as much over as I have got; but first let us punish these cowardly redbreasts."

"Bravo! bravo! We will! We will!"

"Then fetch as much rope as you can."

Two or three set off, and returned with a quantity of thick rope, which they had got out of their waggons.

"Now," said Turpin, naturally assuming the command, "tie them in twos, back to back."

This manoeuvre was quickly executed, and then they found, of course, they had one officer over, for there were five in all.

"Tie him to the waggoner who betrayed me," said Turpin.

In spite of his protestations and desperate resistance, this was done.

They were all quite harmless and helpless.

"Now, I further propose," said Dick, "that we lift them up just as they are, and put them on their horses' backs, and start them off to London."

This was a proposition which rather tickled the fancy of the countrymen; so laughing heartily, they proceeded to put it into execution.

The officers cursed, swore, and threatened.

No heed was paid to them whatever, and they were tied on their horses' backs.

"Good-bye, Mr. Wriggles," said Dick, as he struck the horse upon which that functionary was placed a sharp blow on the flank, causing the jaded creature to set off at a trot; "good-bye—a pleasant journey to you."

The men sent the others off also, and away they went along the high road towards London, screaming out oaths and volleys of abuse the while.

CHAPTER XXI.

TURPIN FINDS HIS PURSE EXHAUSTED, AND RESOLVES TO REPLENISH IT BY STOPPING THE WESTERN COACH, IN WHICH ENTERPRISE TOM KING RENDERS HIM ESSENTIAL ASSISTANCE.

THE countrymen and Dick watched the officers until they were out of sight, and then the latter turned round to address them.

They gave a cheer as he did so, but he held up his hands for silence.

"I cannot," he said, "say enough to you in token of my thanks for the great service you have rendered me. Believe me, I am most grateful. You have acted wisely, so far as your own interests are concerned, by freeing me, for the officers never intended to give you anything for your trouble, but merely use you as tools for their own ends. However, I will keep my word."

As he spoke, Dick put his hand into his pocket, and produced the purse he had taken from Sir Theodore Houghton.

"I offered you ten pounds a-piece," he said, "and I did not say fifteen for the sole reason that I did not know exactly how much money I had about me, and I did not like to promise more than I could perform."

"Hurrah!"

"However, here is my purse, and I intend to share it equally among you. I know there will be nothing under ten pounds a-piece. How many of you are there?"

There was a rapid counting of heads, and then a voice said:

"Twenty-two."

"Twenty-two; that will be two hundred and twenty pounds altogether. Stand forward one at a time."

The men readily came forward, for such a sum seemed a wonderful amount to them, for their week's earnings probably did not amount to as many shillings.

Turpin counted out ten guineas into the hand of every one, and then he found he had a considerable sum left.

"Stand forward again," he said; "I am never liberal by halves, and I will share my purse with you to the last guinea."

He gave them each five guineas, and then found a few remaining.

These he took in his hand, and flung them up in the air to be scrambled for when they came down.

"That will do to drink my health with," he said.

"We must look sharp," said one, "for we shall be late this morning."

"Never mind that for one," said Turpin, catching one of the officer's horses by the bridle, and vaulting into the saddle. "I shall insist on your all drinking my good health for the sake of the laird here. Farewell!"

Without then uttering another word himself, or giving those to whom he had behaved so liberally an opportunity of so doing, he clapped his spurs to the horse's flanks, which made him set forward as quickly as his tired limbs would allow.

Day was beginning to dawn, and he looked warily around him.

No one, however, was in sight, but ere he had proceeded a couple of miles, the faint sound of a horn came upon his ears.

He reined up at once.

"That is the western coach, or I am very much mistaken," he said, "and it comes most opportunely. I have cleared out my pockets, and I must fill them again somehow. I don't think my freedom very dear at the price I have paid for it, and congratulate myself for having got out of so awkward a scrape so well. Black Bess now is all I want."

A shade of anxiety came over his face as he reflected upon the great difficulty there must, inevitably be in regaining possession of her, yet without her he felt he could do nothing.

He almost forgot the coach that was approaching, until another blast of the horn warned him that it would soon reach the spot on which he was standing.

"Oh! the coach. Now I'll warrant it's well loaded, and carries a good booty. It is rather daring to stop so many people at day-dawn, but Dick Turpin is just the man to do it!"

"This, though," he added, "is not at all a suitable place for the job. I am on too high ground. Now, there is a hollow a little further on, with tall trees growing thickly on both sides of the way, and which is always in shadow, even in broad daylight, so that will be the place. I will make the best of my way there."

The winding notes of the horn reached his ears for the third time as he urged his horse forward to the spot he had mentioned, and which was known on the country-side by the name of Deadman's Hollow.

At the rate Dick went he very soon reached this place.

As he had fully anticipated, he found it quite dark, and it became more and more so as he advanced.

Near the centre Deadman's Hollow was intersected by a narrow cross-country lane, and Dick considered if he backed his horse a little way into the entrance of it, he should be able to dart out and take the guard and driver by surprise.

With this intent, then, he increased his speed, and, on reaching the corner, was about to turn round, when, to his unutterable surprise, a mounted man suddenly darted out from it, and placed a pistol to his breast.

"Stand!" he cried, in just such sharp, sudden tones as Turpin himself made use of. "Your money or your life!"

For the space of about half a minute these two men looked at each other in silence.

The eyes of both had become accustomed to the deep gloom in the place, and they could see each other with perfect distinctness.

Dick saw before him his double, the spectre horseman.

There was, however, nothing spectre-like about him now. There he stood palpable enough, and the pistol that was pressed against Dick's breast had a most material feel.

Still he was not in the least alarmed, but only curious to know what should happen next, and who this person really was who resembled him so closely.

All this happened with great rapidity, and before the half-minute had expired Dick had drawn from his holsters a short-barrelled pistol, and with a speed and dexterity acquired only by long practice, clapped it to his opponent's breast, at the same time that he shouted:

"Stand yourself! Hand over all you possess, and that quickly, or you are a dead man!"

It was now the other's turn to be surprised, but he quickly recovered himself as he replied:

"This is a poor jest, as you will find to your cost. Hand over!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Dick laughed loudly—it seemed to him so excessively droll to be stopped on the highway by another.

The other made a gesture of impatience.

"I am a temperate man, and never shed blood if I can by any means avoid it, so to prevent my spilling yours, as I might have done over and over again, I say once more, hand over what valuables you may have about you!"

"I shall do no such thing," replied Dick. "Tell me, first, who you are."

"When I mention my name," said the other, "you will know better than trifle with me. It is Tom King."

"What?"

"Tom King! Deliver—deliver at once, for I cannot stay parleying like this; even now I can hear the coach entering the hollow. Hand me your purse, I say, before I am compelled to take it by force."

"I will give you my hand."

"You are a maniac, I think. I have borne with you so far, but I should advise you not to tempt your fate further!"

Dick replaced his pistol in the holster, and held out his hand.

"Tip us your mawley and let's have a grip. I can prophecy we shall be great friends."

The highwayman seemed rather surprised at Dick's coolness, and looked at him in a bewildered sort of way. He evidently knew not what to think.

But now Dick could hear that the coach was not many hundred yards distant, and as he by no means intended it should pass without paying toll, he said quickly to the highwayman:

"Give me your hand, Tommy, and don't be a fool. You know as well as I do there's no time to lose, for the coach will be here directly. I am known to you by name, I'll warrant, as you were to me, although we have never met before. I am he who is called Dick Turpin."

"I fancied as much," said Tom King, grasping Dick's hand, and pressing it warmly. "But I scarcely dared hope it to be true. This is what I have wished for many and many a time!"

"And so have I. Something seems to tell me we shall be great friends now we have met, and I hope we shall go through many an adventure with each other."

"So do I, with all my heart. We shall, at all events, have one, for here comes the coach."

"Tell me, Tom," said Dick, "did you really take up a position here to stop the coach?"

"I did; but when I heard you coming, of course I thought I would do a little business with you first."

"It is rather a remarkable circumstance, but I made my way hither for the very same purpose as yourself, and I was just about to take up a position, when you pounced out upon me."

"It is strange, indeed, but we must talk further upon the subject after the coach has passed, for here it is!"

"Agreed."

"You, then," said Tom King, "had better place yourself on the other side of the road, while I remain where I am, and we can then both ride forward and attack the coach on both sides at once."

"Bravo! that is a capital scheme. Take care of yourself."

"All right. Don't fear for me; we have stopped coaches before now single-handed, and I am sure we can do the thing well together."

"We ought to do. Hush! they are here!"

Dick, as he gave this caution to his new friend, backed his horse a little way down the lane, on the other side.

He had scarcely come to look to the priming of his pistols before the heads of the first horses appeared.

Then he darted out swiftly from his place of concealment, and catching the one nearest to him by the bridle, turned him completely round.

The other horses, of course, turned with him, so the cumbersome vehicle was brought to a standstill instantly.

At the same moment Tom King rode out from his side of the road, and cried, in a loud voice—

"Halt!"

"Then, before anyone had time to recover from their surprise, he discharged a pistol in the air.

The natural effect of these summary proceedings on the part of the two highwaymen was that all the passengers were filled with dread, and expected their last hour had come.

"If you attempt to drive on before the toll is paid you will have a bullet through your head for your trouble; but if you remain still you will come to no harm."

"In the meanwhile, Dick left the off leader's head, and repeated the same warning to the guard as Tom King had given to the driver.

The rapidity of their manoeuvres, and the sternness of their tones, made all conscious that they had fallen into the hands of men who would not be trifled with; so the guard very prudently replaced his blunderbuss in the case from which he had taken it.

There then remained only the passengers to grapple with, and from none of these was any resistance worth mentioning to be anticipated.

Tom King let down the coach window at his side while he shouted to Dick—

"Keep a sharp look-out, and if anyone makes the least movement, fire! I will attend to the inmates!"

When he looked in he found the coach tolerably full of passengers.

"Quick, ladies and gentlemen!" he said; "hand me your money, watches, rings, and trinkets, and don't be foolish enough to resist, for it can only have the effect of making things much worse for you in the end."

He played with a very elegantly-finished pistol while he spoke in such a careless manner that a nervous old lady in the coach gave a scream, and then went off into a fit at once.

"I would advise you to make haste, my friends, for this pistol has a strange knack of going off and shooting anyone who dallies, so I give you warning in time."

A young, and so far as Tom King could tell by the faint, uncertain light in the interior of the coach, an extremely pretty girl was seated next to the door; and when he had finished speaking, she put into his hand a very slender purse and a small locket.

"Take those, Mr. Highwayman, for I suppose you must have them," she said, in a trembling, agitated voice. "Heaven knows how ill I can afford them! Take them. I have nothing more!"

"If I do, may I be—! Never mind, my dear, keep them. I would not take anything from you but a kind word and glance for all the world. But you, sir," he added, turning to a portly man, who was seated opposite to her, "but you, sir, I can see can afford to lose a little without much inconvenience. Sc shell out!"

The man thus adjured, and who looked like a country gentleman, took a handful of guineas and put them into Tom's hand, as he said—

"There, take those, you vagabond, and be off, and think yourself lucky. It is not worth while, as you are armed and I am not, for me to throw away my life for the sake of a little money."

"You are a very sensible man, but I must trouble you to hand over a little more before I have done with you."

"No, let me be able to pay you the same compliment as you did me, and be satisfied with what you have got from me, and levy your contributions on some of the others."

"You are a jolly good-humoured fellow," said King, "and I will follow your advice. Come, sir," he added, addressing a thin, sharp-featured man, "let me trouble you next, if you please. I daresay you all know my name. It's Tom King. I never yet made a practice of ill-using those I have eased of their superfluous cash, but have simply taken what was offered me, provided it was any way reasonable."

With a groan, this man placed a guinea in Tom's hand, who turned it over and over with so comical an air that the other passengers laughed outright.

"That is all I can spare," said the thin-faced man. "Take it. I hope some day to have the pleasure of hearing you are hung!"

"Thank you."

Tom still turned the guinea over and over in his palm.

"I am getting rather impatient, so make haste!"

"I have given you all I can afford, indeed I have. I am a poor man, and money is of great value to me."

"Now that man is a humbug," said the stout gentleman, who had behaved so liberally. "I happen to know

him very well. He is a maker of Brummagem buttons, and is better c with respect to money than anyone in the coach."

"Oh! indeed," said Tom King, "then I shall have to deal rather harshly with him for his deception. Now, Mr. Brummagem Buttons, I shall count three slowly, and if by that time you do not hand over every farthing you have about you, the pistol is sure to go off."

"No, no! mercy, Mr. Highwayman! Don't believe him—don't believe him! I am a poor man—a very poor man, indeed. However, I will give you a guinea more."

"One!" said Tom.

"Yes, yes! here it is. I said one, good sir—here it is."

"Two!"

"Don't go on, Mr. Rob—Highwayman, or I am a ruined man."

"Three!" said Tom; "now give me all you have, or I fire."

"Here it is; take it—take all I have and beggar me; I would rather part with my money than my life."

"You are wise to do so," said Tom, pocketing a bag containing at least a hundred guineas; "the one you do stand a chance of replacing, but not so the other. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I have nearly enough, but it would be wrong to show any favour, so the remainder will please put their contributions in here."

He took off his hat as he spoke, and held it crown downwards in the coach.

It grew heavy in a very few moments, for all the travellers in the carriage could not but be conscious that Tom was, under the circumstances, acting in what he doubtless considered was a handsome manner.

As for Turpin, he had made good use of the time that his companion took to attend to the insides, for he had managed to collect, without much difficulty, a very respectable sum from those who rode on the top of the coach.

By the time he had finished, Tom had emptied the contents of his hat into his pocket, and, making a very graceful bow to the travellers, withdrew.

"Now, coachy," he said, "hold your hat; you have behaved very decently indeed, so here is something to drink my health with; and now drive on."

So saying, he tossed a guinea into the coachman's hat. "Thankee, your honour," he said. "Good night. Don't forget Charley. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander!"

He turned round, and saw the guard holding his hat in a most eloquent manner.

"Oh! you're Charley, are you. All right. You're a trump, so here's a guinea for you."

The coachman gathered up his reins, and, turning his horses' heads in the proper direction, drove off towards London.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK TURPIN FINDS IT MORE DIFFICULT TO REGAIN POSSESSION OF BLACK BESS THAN HE ANTICIPATED.

"Well, Tom," said Dick Turpin, to his new companion, as he watched the coach disappear, "I consider we have had a very easy job."

"And so do I," replied Tom King. "Uncommon easy, and very profitable. The insides shelled out like bricks."

"Well, I didn't do amiss with the outsiders, but I vote we divide the swag when we have a better opportunity."

"We will. You see, in a very short time now it will be broad daylight, so I think it imperative we should look for some kind of shelter."

"It is imperative. Let us get on as fast as possible." They both spurred their horses, and Deadman's Hollow was soon left behind.

"Where do you propose to go, Dick?" asked Tom King. "I know of no shelter hereabouts."

"I suppose not, for this is scarcely your locality. You are most heard of on the north road, I think."

"Yes, but I got down here a day or two ago, and something has been happening ever since to prevent my getting back."

"I have had a more than ordinary share of adventures during the last four days; but you will laugh when I tell you the circumstances."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"Well, you must first answer me a question."

"Very good; I have no objection."

"Were you anywhere near Wimbledon Common four nights ago?"

"Yes."

"Were you in a lane that goes by a cross-country out to London?"

"I was; and while there a singular thing happened to me."

"So there did to me; but now I fancy it will not be strange much longer."

"You are making me very curious. Do not keep me any longer in suspense, I beg."

"It would tire you to tell you what happened during that eventful night; let it suffice to say I was wounded in the shoulder."

"Yes, yes."

"It was little more than a scratch, and I received it during great excitement; so I forgot all about it."

"I suppose it bled a great deal, and so prevented you feeling any pain."

"That was just it. I went riding on and on, never thinking; but all this while the blood was escaping from my shoulder at a prodigious rate; presently I began to get very weak, and shook in my saddle, while once or twice the clear, moonlit atmosphere, seemed changed to blood!"

"You must have lost a great deal of vital fluid for that symptom to show itself."

"Well, be that as it may, I felt something was the matter with my shoulder, and I put my hand to it, and found my coat was sopping wet. Upon this I took off my cravat, and bandaged up the wound, stanching the blood as well as I was able; but when I had finished I almost fell off my horse."

"It was a fortunate thing for you the officers did not show themselves just then, or it would have been all up with you."

"It would, that's certain. However, this is the strange occurrence of which I spoke."

"You have made plenty of prefatory remarks about it, so I should like to know what it was without further circumlocution."

"You shall; but I have said no more than was necessary for the comprehension of the incident; indeed, hardly enough."

"I will dispense with the remainder."

"Very well. As I lifted up my head from binding my shoulder my brain swam round and round, and I had the greatest difficulty conceivable in keeping my seat at all."

"You said that before."

"Oh! did I? I had forgotten; you shouldn't interrupt me—you put me out."

"Go on, then, your own way; but it seems to me as though you never meant to tell me what the incident really was."

"Oh! you be hanged. Don't be so impatient, we shall have plenty of time to talk."

"Will you tell me what the incident was?" asked Tom King, quite out of patience, "for I want to know where we are going to shelter."

"Don't trouble about that, but just leave it to me. I will find you a place where you will be as right as ninepence. Just listen to this mysterious incident."

"I've been doing that for the last quarter of an hour."

"Well, I didn't fall out of the saddle, but when I looked along the road, although my eyes were dim and my head spinning like a top, I saw something misty and shadowy approaching."

"You fancy it looked misty, but I fancy the mist was nowhere but in your own eyes."

"Very likely; but I tell you I saw something shadowy-like, and in a moment or so it took the form of a horse and rider."

"Yes; what was there wonderful in that?"

"I'll tell you. The moon was shining with unusual brightness, and when I looked closer I saw this rider was attired and mounted exactly like myself. The features, too, were just the same."

"Nonsense!"

"I fancied so, at any rate, and I believe they were. It was not a delusion. I am confident!"

"What became of it, then?"

"Why, it jumped over a hedge in a manner none but Black Bess could have done, and then both horse and rider galloped over the meadows and disappeared."

There was a smile on Tom King's face, as he listened to his friend's narration.

"It's very strange—very strange indeed! And you thought it something supernatural?"

"I confess I did until to-night, when something occurred to change my opinion."

"What was that, pray?"

"I was very closely pursued by the officers, but I had a chance of putting into execution a rather old ruse, but yet a generally successful one—that of dismounting and hiding behind the hedgerow, while I gave the horse a sharp out, that made him fly along the road at a slashing pace."

"It's a very good dodge, and I have found it succeed more than once. However, go on."

"Well, then I got through a gap in the hedge, and then laid close down on the grass, while I peeped through to see what the officers would be after."

"Yes."

"They were quickly down the lane, and then they all halted, and appeared to be looking very intently at something. I followed the direction of their eyes, and there I saw the same figure as I had seen in the lane at Wimbledon three nights before."

"Didn't you think you saw your fetch?" asked King, with the same smile playing about his lips.

"I thought I saw my double, but the closer and better look I was able to have showed me it was only someone generally resembling me in appearance."

"Yes; as I might."

"Just so. I have hardly a doubt about the matter; but, quite for my own satisfaction, tell me whether you were in the lane I described, and whether you took a flying leap over the hedge into the meadows?"

"I was, my boy, and I did; and it was also me that you saw standing in the high road. Confound it! it appears I have you to thank for the chase the officers gave me, and the narrow escape I had, since they doubtless fell into the same mistake as you did, and took me to be you. It's a nice thing, upon my word! However, it don't matter, as they did not nab me."

"Well, Tom, my friend, whether you believe me or not, I can assure you it has taken a great weight off my mind. It is so much better to have a matter of that sort cleared up. It appears, however, that no slight thanks are due to you for the assistance you so unknowingly rendered me in making my escape."

"Don't mention that, I beg. Odd things do drop out, and one of the odd ones is that we have never met each other before to-night."

"It is rather singular, but we have always kept separate beats. As, though, we got on so well to-night together, I propose we enter into an alliance offensive and defensive. What do you say?"

"Why, you have just anticipated the proposition I was going to make to you myself in almost the very words you have used!"

"That's rather singular, and so it is that I should be stopped on the highway by anyone, and be told to fork over."

"Very singular, as you say."

"However," said Turpin, "I hope that a friendship so strangely began may long continue."

"And so do I, but I hope it won't end as it began."

"How do you mean?"

"At the point of a pistol!"

"No fear. What a strange idea that was! Dear me, everything seems to be strange to-night!"

"It does."

"Give me your hand again, my friend, and let us pledge ourselves to an eternal friendship."

"Agreed!" said Tom King, holding his out to his companion.

Dick shook it warmly, and holding his hand up to the sky, which was just beginning to be tinged by the rays of the rising sun, said—

"I swear, Tom, that through thick and thin I will stand by you, and prove myself your staunch friend!"

"And I also swear the same thing towards you!" said Tom King, returning the friendly pressure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM DAVIS VOLUNTEERS TO GO TO LONDON FOR DICK TO TRY TO GET BLACK BESS BACK AGAIN.

A BRIEF silence followed these words, during which the two friends pressed their horses forward.

It was Tom King who spoke first.

"I am trusting altogether to you, Dick, to find a place of shelter, for, comparatively speaking, I am a stranger hereabouts."

"We shall be right enough."

"I only hope it isn't far off. Just look how fast the sun is mounting in the sky. We shall have everybody abroad directly."

"I should fancy five minutes will take us to it."

"Where is it, then, that you intend to go?"

"To the 'Hand and Keys,' close to Hornsey Wood. Do you know it?"

"I can't say that I do."

"Nor Tom Davis, the landlord?"

"No."

"Oh! he is a first-rate fellow, and will be overjoyed at seeing you."

"Is he safe?"

"Yes; I have trusted him with my life a hundred times, and would do a hundred times more. We have been firm friends for years. Look," he added, "can you see that large, rambling, old-fashioned building yonder, standing a good way back from the road, and with a signpost on the footpath?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the 'Hand and Keys,' so we have not far to go to get housed."

"I am glad of it. Our exploit to-night will sure to cause a great deal of commotion, and the search after us will be a warm one."

"I don't doubt that. I must say it was a most important thing for two men to stop a coach full of people by daylight."

"Rather!" said Tom, as he trotted, with Turpin, into the yard in front of the inn.

No one appeared to be about. The blinds were all down, and the inmates apparently one and all in deep repose.

"Get off your horse, Tom," said Dick. "I'll show you where the stable is. We'll give the cattle a feed ourselves, and by that time I daresay some of them will be up, and then we shall be able to get something to eat, for this keen morning air has made me as hungry as a hunter."

"And me. That reminds me I have been going to ask you ever so many times what has become of your famous mare, Black Bess. Is she laid up lame somewhere, that you are riding another?"

"No; but I was set on in London, and obliged to run through the streets on foot. I could not get at Black Bess, who, I hope, is safe in a stable somewhere. This is the second horse I have had to-night, or rather last night, and they are neither worth a rush. I must occupy myself to-day in devising some means of getting her back again."

By this time they reached the stable-door, but they found it fast.

"That's no consequence," said Dick. "I didn't expect to find it unlocked. Jabez sleeps up in the loft, and we shall soon wake him up."

Turpin kicked against the stable-door with the heel of his heavy jack boot.

He made a prodigious clatter.

"Cuss you all!" said a surly voice, "what do you want?"

The owner of the voice projected his head through a narrow window.

"Make haste down, Jabez!" said Turpin, as he caught sight of him.

"Make haste be hanged!" replied the ostler, and he shut the window with a bang.

Almost directly afterwards Jabez opened the door, and the two highwaymen led their horses into the stable.

"Who'd a'thought of seeing you here agin so soon, squire?" said Jabez to Turpin.

"No one, I fancy, for I didn't myself till an hour ago. I am sorry to fetch you up, but it's past sunrise."

Then, observing that Jabez looked rather curiously at Tom, Turpin hastened to add—

"This, Jabez, is a particular friend of mine, and a gentleman you will be proud to make the acquaintance of. He's a regular out-and-outer, and his name is Tom King."

"You don't say so?" replied Jabez. "I've heard of him many's the time lately. Why, they do say, squire, he's only second to you!"

"Well, Jabez," said Tom King, "you and Dick here seem to be very good friends, and I don't see why we shouldn't be, eh,?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Well, I'm particularly careful about my nag here, so pray use her well. Here's a guinea to drink my health with."

"Your honour's a perfect gentleman," said Jabez, as he consigned the coin to his breeches pocket, "and I only hope as how we shall often have the pleasure of seeing you at the 'Land and Keys.'"

"I have no objection to your having such a wish."

However, first of all let me see how well you can fettle my nag. As for that one the squire's got, it's good for nothing, and is one he took off a police-officer."

"He! he! Off a hoffer! What a good joke! He! he! he!"

Jabez chuckled enormously as he went about his work.

"No one knows," said Turpin, "how overjoyed I shall be when I get Black Bess. I am certain no lover was ever so fond of his mistress as I am of my bonny mare. She is, beyond all question, the finest piece of horseflesh that ever existed. She is, to use a common expression, worth her weight in gold!"

"I can readily believe you are anxious to get possession of her again; I should think it went very much against the grain to leave her behind you."

"You are quite right, it did. But I could not help myself. It was an utter impossibility for me to reach her. The officers were too close after me for that."

"Well, let us hope you will soon have her back."

"I shall not be fit to undertake another adventure until I do."

"Then, if that's the case, I shall almost feel tempted to make a journey to London myself and fetch her."

"I am afraid you would stand but little chance of success, and besides which, you would be running your neck into unnecessary danger."

"Well, there would be some little risk, of course."

"My friend, do not think of it for a moment. I would never permit it, so say no more upon the subject."

"I will not, but, in the event of your getting her soon, will you allow me to give you a little advice?"

"Certainly; I hope you will never hesitate to speak to me with perfect frankness and candour."

"It is this, then. London and its vicinity is by far too hot to hold us, so I propose that we take a trip into some of the south-western counties, as being a portion of England we have neither of us visited professionally."

"The advice is good, and I will follow it the moment I have the opportunity. I am beginning to long for a change, and I fancy such a trip as you mention would be just the very thing. Why, we should have lots of first-rate adventures on the road there, and also drink our stay!"

"We should, and they would have all the charm of novelty. I am glad you approve of the scheme."

"I do, most entirely. If I had my mare I would be off to-night. But come, Jabez has groomed and fed your horse, so we will try if we cannot get into the inn and have something to eat."

"I am awfully hungry," said Tom.

Arm in arm the two friends made their way to the back door of the inn.

It opened to their touch, and they found when they entered that Tom Davis was up and dressed and busy taking down the shutters.

"Good morning, Tom!" shouted Dick, as the landlord appeared with a couple of shutters on his shoulders. "How are you?"

"God bless me!" he said, almost letting fall the shutters in his surprise, "if it is not the squire back again. Come into the kitchen. I have got a good fire; you know you are always welcome."

"I know I am, and that's why I sought shelter here this morning."

The landlord hastily put down the shutters, and bustled into the kitchen.

"Now, Tom," said Dick, "before we go any farther, just allow me to introduce you to a new but very particular friend of mind, Tom King."

"Tom King!" exclaimed Davis, "is it possible? Here, give us your hand, my boy, I am heartily glad to see you!"

King bowed, and held out his hand in reply to this very cordial welcome.

"We are both tired and faint," said Dick, "for we have worked very hard, and have had nothing to eat, so we shall be glad of a little breakfast as soon as you can get it."

"It's as good as done, for I'll set about it myself at once. No, I won't, though, for here comes my wife, and, gadzooks! Ellen, too!"

"Ellen!" exclaimed Dick, in a tone of pleasure. "I had forgotten her for the moment. I shall be glad to look into her face again."

"It's a main pretty one, and no mistake, and the best thing is, too, that her goodness equals her beauty. I would not have her go away on any account, short as is the time she has been with us. I love her as much as I should if she was my own daughter. Ay, even more, for aught I know, for I question whether a daughter of mine would ever be so good as she is."

The words had scarcely left the landlord's lips, when Mrs. Davis and Ellen entered the room.

There was a wonderful difference already visible in the countenance of the young girl. Her cheeks had filled out, and her face had lost its ordinary paleness.

The greeting between her and Dick was warm indeed, and Tom King observed, with an expressive shrug—

"Oh! that's how the wind blows, is it? Well, all I can say is, I admire his taste."

His surprise was very much augmented when Dick introduced her to him, and afterwards, in a few whispered words told him what he knew of her history.

The huge table in the kitchen was quickly covered with a profusion of generous fare, and while this was in progress, Davis finished taking down the shutters.

Ten minutes more saw them all doing justice to the really excellent and tempting breakfast laid before them, to which their keen hunger imparted a pleasant relish.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CURIOSITY INDUCES TURPIN AND TOM KING TO WITNESS A CEREMONY WHICH, ALTHOUGH OBSOLETE AT THE PRESENT DAY, IS YET COUNTENANCED BY THE LAW.

"I NEVER dreamt," said Dick, as he helped himself to a huge slice of fried ham and a couple of eggs, "I never dreamt for a moment, Davis, when I parted with you on the door-step the night before last, that I should be back again so quickly. By-the-bye, how did you get on at the inquest?"

"Why, not at all."

"Not at all?"

"How should we? Why, it doesn't take place till to-day!"

"The deuce it don't! That's very awkward. I've half a mind to be off again!"

"Oh! nonsense, don't talk such rubbish. No one need know you are here unless you wish it."

"Then, that makes all the difference. I don't want to be dragged forward, I can assure you!"

"You must keep out of sight, then, or they are bound to call upon you if they have any idea you are in the neighbourhood."

"What inquest is it, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"On the body of a man who committed suicide in the bedroom upstairs."

"Good gracious! What an unpleasant thing to have happen in a house!"

"You're right enough there," said the landlord; "but it's one of those casualties you can't possibly avoid. I shall be very glad now when it's all over."

"Yes. Was there anything at all peculiar in the case?"

"There was; very peculiar indeed. In fact, it was about as tragic as anything well could be."

Dick then briefly gave an account of the circum-

stances attending the suicide of Simms, the steward's son, with which the reader is already familiar.

Tom King listened to the end with rapt attention. "Wonderful!" he said. "The ends of justice are sometimes strangely worked out! I suppose there is very little doubt as to what verdict will be returned by the jury?"

"None at all, fancy. As clear as case of *felo-de-see* as ever I heard of."

"Yes," added Davis; "the cross roads will be his grave, sure enough."

"Do you think they will carry out the law to the letter?" asked Tom King.

"I am certain. The matter, of course, has been well talked over in the kitchen here."

"I don't doubt that," said Dick. "The whole affair must have been a godsend in the way of gossip and speculation to the people in the village."

"I can assure you," said Tom King, "I cannot resist feeling deeply interested in it, and, for my own part, should like to be present while the inquest takes place."

"Well, there's nothing to prevent that," said the landlord. "I hardly think you are well known enough about here for you to fear recognition."

"I think not, and even if I was I would run a little risk to gratify my curiosity."

"Now the worst of it is," said Dick, "with respect to myself, that some of them would be sure to recognise me as Mr. Richards, and I should be called upon to give evidence—a thing I particularly wish to avoid, for, in coming so prominently forward, I should be sure to be detected."

"Perhaps not," said Tom King. "However, don't let me draw you into it. You make yourself snug here somewhere all day, but I shall watch the proceedings. Where is the inquest to be held, landlord?"

"In the clubroom upstairs. It has all been put ready, and I expect the coroner and jury here at eleven o'clock."

"Well, now it is only just six," said Tom King, as he glanced at the face of the old family clock which stood in a recess near the door, "so, if you like, I'll just take a few hours' rest, and if I shouldn't wake up in time for the performance, just give me a call."

All rose from the table as King uttered these words, and Turpin, taking Ellen by the hand, led her to the window, where they could converse together without being overheard.

"Well, my dear girl," said Dick, tenderly, "I know it is hardly necessary to ask you, but are you quite happy in your new home?"

"Oh! quite—quite happy; happier than I have ever in my life before. Indeed, until I came here, I did not properly understand the meaning of the word. Davis and his wife overwhelm me with kindness."

"Then, believe me, Ellen," said Dick, "it causes me great happiness to hear you say you are so comfortable. I feel that my rescue of you from a fate worse than death itself is a good action in my life that will outweigh many of the bad ones I have done."

"Now, Dick," said Tom King, "are you coming to have an hour or two's rest, as well as myself?"

"Yes, my friend, I am weary. But I want to say a word or two to Davis here."

"All right! you can tell me as we go upstairs."

"Very good," said Dick. "It was concerning Black Bess I wished to speak."

"Black Bess! has anything happened to her?"

"Well, no hurt, I hope; but last night the officers surrounded the 'Three Tuns,' and made an attack upon it, trying very hard to make me a prisoner."

"I told you they would before you started."

"They did. However, there was a bit of a tussle, and I managed to make my escape through a window into a court, but the grabs were close behind and I had to run for my life."

"Then, of course, under such circumstances, you could not get Bess out of the stable in the alley?"

"No, I could not, and there I have no doubt she is now, at least such is my hope. Now I want to get her back again, for without her I can do nothing."

"I fancy now," said Davis, "you have applied to just the right person in the scrape you have fallen into. If it wasn't for that confounded inquest, I'd start off now and

fetch her; but, as it is, we must both be content to wait till it's over."

"I knew you would help me out of this difficulty," said Dick; "for of course you must know it would be utter madness for me to go and fetch her myself. The place is sure to be well watched by the officers."

"You may take your 'davy of that! But don't let the matter trouble you a moment longer. Rely upon it, I'll bring her here safe and sound!"

"Thanks! and now which is our bedroom?"

"Why, this attic. It has two beds in it, and is a tolerable size. You may make yourself safe here as long as you like."

"I can believe you, Tom Davis, for you have never deceived me yet."

"And never will," said the landlord, closing the door.

"Good morning, friends!"

"Good morning, Davis," replied the two highwaymen, throwing themselves wearily on each of the beds.

In less than five minutes they were both sound asleep, for they had undergone no slight amount of exertion during the preceding night, and were proportionably fatigued.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BURIAL OF THE SUICIDE IN THE CROSS ROADS AT HORSEY.

IT wanted only a few minutes of eleven when Tom King opened his eyes again.

Dick was still sleeping heavily, so King rose and made a few alterations in his toilette in silence.

This was an operation that did not take him many moments to perform, and he was soon making his way downstairs.

He met the landlord upon the landing.

"I was just coming up to call you," he said.

"Oh! were you? Then you are a day after the fair."

"So it seems. The jury have begun to arrive."

"Have they?"

"Yes. Soon, is it not?"

"Very soon."

"The fact is, they are as impatiently curious as you are."

"The inquest, then, will begin punctually at eleven?"

"I'll warrant you, not a minute later."

"So much the better. I shan't get tired of waiting."

The speakers rapidly descended the stairs, and then Davis, pushing open a door, ushered Tom into the clubroom.

It was quite full of people, and at least ten of the jury were seated at the table, so Tom King's entrance caused no particular notice.

Scarcely, however, had he time to note the general aspect of the room, when the coroner and the remaining jurymen arrived.

Then followed the swearing-in ceremony, after which they all adjourned to view the body.

But, however full of interest the proceedings might be to Tom King, we think it hardly worth while to describe them in detail, especially when the purpose can be answered in a few words.

The coroner and the jury, then, were about as obstinate and thickheaded—the beadle as pompous—the medical officer as elaborate as they generally are under such circumstances.

On returning to their seats, the inquiry was commenced; but there was so little evidence, and that so much to the point, that when it was given, the jury required, or at all events took very few minutes to decide, and a verdict of *Felo-de-se* was returned, which was just what everyone had made up their minds to all along.

The poor wretch, who certainly might have been consigned to the tomb without such an indignity being wreaked upon his mangled remains, was, in pursuance of a barbarous law, which is still in force, though rarely if ever put into execution at the present time, sentenced to be buried in the centre where four roads meet, and a stake to be driven through his breast.

Even at that time the sentence began to excite abhorrence, but as it was not often a case occurred, the feeling most generally elicited was that morbid curiosity for the horrible which is to a certain extent inherent in every breast.



[THE YOUNG PRETENDER HAS A SWORD COMBAT WITH TOM KING.]

The inquest was over shortly after midday, and the burial was ordered to take place at midnight.

It was a good day for Davis, so far as the consumption of eatables and drinkables was concerned.

Tom found he was as busy as possible in the bar; so, without showing himself, he went upstairs to his attic.

"I wonder how long Turpin is going to sleep," he said. "One would think, to look at and hear him, that he had not been to bed for a month!"

Dick was, indeed, sleeping soundly; but that was a circumstance little to be wondered at, considering all that he had gone through.

"Well," continued King, as he threw himself again upon the other bed, "I suppose it is best, for he will wake up fresh and vigorous, and ready for anything."

Three hours afterwards the landlord entered the room, and finding both his guests asleep, awoke them.

"I am off now," he said to Turpin; "but I thought I would speak to you first. You say you left Beas in the stable belonging to the 'Three Tuns'?"

"Yes, the one in the alley."

"I know."

"The place will sure, I fancy, be well guarded by the police. Have you any plan for getting possession of the mare?"

"Well, I can't say I have at present, but on my way there I daresay I shall think of something!"

"I only hope you will, and that your effort will be successful. Without Black Beas, I am like a ship without a rudder."

"I'll tell you what it is, Turpin," interrupted Tom King; "as soon as there is an opportunity, you must tell me how it was you came to possess such a magnificent creature as your mare is; and there are many other passages in your history to which, in the short time I have been with you, you have alluded, and which I feel a deep curiosity to hear."

"You shall be satisfied, Tom. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do."

"What?"

"One of these very next days, when we have the time to spare, and I feel in the humour, I will relate to you succinctly the whole story of my life, from the commencement of my career until I met you in the lane, but upon one sole condition."

"And what is that?"

"That your reciprocate the favour, and in return for my history give me yours, which I am full of anxiety to hear."

"Agreed; and now finish your arrangements with Davis here, for I can see he is impatient to be off."

"Well, Davis, my friend, I don't know there is any more I can say. You, of course, will be known as coming from me, and Johnson will deliver her to you. I shall leave you to devise a means of baulking the officers, if any should happen to interfere with you, and remember, when you are once on the back of Black Bess you are safe, for the horse that can run swifter than she has yet to be foaled."

"I know you have a great idea of her speed, Dick; and justly, too, I should imagine, considering the number of times that her fleetness must have been so vital to you."

"Just so. Let us see. It is close upon four now," said Turpin, looking at his watch, "and it will take you rather better than half-an-hour to get to Seven Dials. I wouldn't hurry there, though. I think it will be better if it is dusk when you arrive."

"I shall certainly stand a better chance of getting off if it is, so I will delay my departure half-an-hour."

"Do so, my friend; and, if you are not aware of it already, let me tell you it is the worst of all policy to ruin anything by precipitation."

"I am well aware of it, and fully believe in its truth. I may be back with comparative quickness, and I may not return till morning. It is all according as circumstances turn out."

"I can trust you, I am well aware, so I leave you to do your best. By-the-bye, was the verdict you anticipated returned?"

"Yes, *Felo-de-se!* and they will bury him at the cross roads, with a stake through his heart, at midnight."

"Oh! indeed. Then the probability is, Davis, you will be absent from that interesting ceremony."

"And glad I shall be, for, what with one thing and another, I have had rather more of old Simms's son than I care about, though if I happened to be at home it would be a bit of satisfaction to know he was thoroughly disposed of."

"I daresay it would," said Tom King; "but it strikes me you feel just as much interest and curiosity in the matter as I do. I always make it a point of seeing all I can, and I have never had a chance of seeing one of these midnight funerals before, so intend to see this one."

"Well, I have not the least objection," said Tom Davis; "I daresay you will find it a diabolical spectacle."

"What do you say, Turpin?" asked King. "I am going; will you bear me company?"

"Willingly. Not that I have much relish for such scenes; for my taste lies in quite a different direction. I shall, however, if Davis does not come back before the ceremony takes place, be very glad to accompany you, for, being anxious, the time will hang heavily upon my hands, if I have nothing to occupy my thoughts."

"That's right!" said Tom; "I didn't half like the idea of going by myself."

"And I," said the landlord, as he moved towards the door, "will go downstairs and get a cup of tea, after which I will be off. As for you, gentlemen, I shouldn't advise you to show yourselves at all till night; so I think the best thing you can do is to lie down and rest while you have the chance."

"All right, my boy," said Dick, "and I hope with the darkness I shall see you return with Black Bess."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOW-STREET RUNNERS ARE VERY WRATH AGAINST DICK, AND RESOLVE TO CAPTURE HIM AT ALL HAZARDS, WHICH MAKES HIS PROJECTED JOURNEY INTO THE SOUTH-WESTERN COUNTIES ALL THE MORE IMPERATIVE.

NIGHT came.

Dark, drear, and wintry, with a blustering wind blow-

ing up from the north-east, bringing occasionally with it a dash of heavy rain-drops, which came against all objects with as much force and suddenness as sea-spray.

From the horizon to the zenith the heavens were covered with one huge black cloud, which was in no place lighter or thinner than in others—it was like one vast funeral pall.

It was a night on which few people would move from their firesides, unless some very powerful motive called them abroad; it was, in fine, a night which fitly harmonized with the ghastly ceremony about to be performed.

It would, indeed, have seemed a profanation—a hideous mockery—if the moon had shed her fair, pure light upon so horrible a scene.

Three-quarters past eleven was just pealing out from Hornsey church when the front door of the "Hand and Keys" inn was flung open, and the burial train appeared upon its threshold.

Slowly, and with solemn steps, the little party, to the number of five-and-twenty, made their way across the inn yard into the high-road.

Six persons bore the coffin containing the suicide's remains, and which was to be rudely cast into a hole dug in the stony road, without the performance of those sacred rites the Christian church ordains.

And as if this were in all conscience not enough, the inanimate clay was to be legally mutilated.

Truly was it a deed more suited to the sensibilities of savages at some early period of the world's history than civilized men, and that, too, in the middle of the last century, when science, art, and good breeding were supposed to have reached the highest point of perfection.

It seems incredible that such could be the opinion of those living at the time when so sickening a custom was not only tolerated but enforced.

Yet, stranger still to say, this barbaric and inhuman law has never been repealed; and it is to avoid its consummation that juries, now-a-days, almost invariably return in a case of suicide a verdict of temporary insanity.

By this means only can they ensure the burial of the corpse in consecrated ground.

But would it not, we ask, be better for this most disgraceful law to be erased from the statute book of England, than for juries to be forced to give in a false verdict?

There can be but one reply to such a question.

The nearest cross roads to the "Hand and Keys"—or four lanes end, as they expressively termed it—was where the narrow country lane, in which Tom King had taken up his position to rob the western coach, crossed the highway.

At some remote period it had doubtless been the scene of a similar occurrence, from which its unpleasant designation of Deadman's Hollow was derived.

Those persons who had been selected to accompany the coffin and to relieve those who bore it from its weight, carried in their hands huge pinewood torches, which, baffled and blown about by the wind, cast but a flickering and uncertain light upon surrounding objects.

Davis, the landlord, had not returned from his dangerous mission when the procession started, so, as they had agreed, the two highwaymen descended from the waggon and followed slowly after them.

They hung back, though, considerably in the rear, taking care not to expose themselves too much to the gaze of the curious villagers.

Their caution was scarcely necessary, for the coffin of the suicide absorbed all their faculties. They had eyes and ears for nothing else.

Both Turpin and King were silent. The solemnity of the scene had its due effect upon them. They felt, without knowing why, that speech would be out of place.

At their slow pace twenty minutes brought them to the cross roads in Deadman's Hollow.

Here they found a large concourse of people assembled, who were anxiously awaiting the arrival of the cortege.

The grave was already dug. The stones and yellow sticky clay, that had been turned up from it, were piled in a large mound upon the margin of the grave.

Across this mound was laid a newly-cut hedge-stake, some seven or eight feet in length, one end of which was sharpened to a point.

A few moments' bustle and confusion ensued upon the

arrival of the body, but it subsided almost as suddenly as it arose.

"This is a very solemn scene, Dick," said Tom King, drawing his cloak closer round him to protect himself from the bleak wind. "What with the weather, and what with this strange funeral, I am chilled to the very bone!"

"And I, too!" said Dick. "I think, however, we may safely venture to draw closer. As we are here, we may as well see all, for it is not probable we shall have another opportunity."

"I hope and trust not," said Tom King. "I could hardly credit such things were done, and that is why I felt so curious. It is to be hoped so loathsome a spectacle will, in the course of a few years, be wholly unknown except by name."

The bearers of the coffin paused for a moment on the brink of the grave, and then, letting go the handles, dropped it in.

It reached the bottom with a strange, dull, rattling sound.

"Stand aside, there, you folks," said a man at this moment, pushing his way into the centre of the ring the bystanders had formed around the grave; "stand back, there, will you!"

This man, who was rather short and very fat, and having apparently much of the animal in his composition, drew himself up as he uttered these words with what he thought was a dignified air.

"I suppose that's the parish beadle," said Dick to a man who was standing near him.

"Yes; and parish constable too. But who are you," asked the man, curiously, "as doesn't know him? Why, everybody knows Tobias Primp!"

"We are travellers from London," said Dick, readily, "and I dare say the same motive that brought you here brought us too."

"What is that?"

"Curiosity, to be sure!"

The man turned away, and was silent.

In the meantime, Mr. Tobias Primp had taken up the hedge-stake and held it in a vertical position.

"Now, then, one or two of you lend a hand here," he said, with as much authority as if he had been lord of the manor. "Lend a hand here, and assist me in the execution of the law!"

Several persons sprang with alacrity into the ring.

"No! no!" shrieked a voice, which, from the tone, was evidently a female one. "No! no! You cannot—shall not do the deed! Fall back, and fill up the grave, but do not mangle his poor remains! You will not read the prayers for the dead over him, I know; but surely his mother's prayers will prove equally as efficacious!"

A strange and universal impulse prompted those who were thronging round to draw back, and as they did so, a woman dashed with wild gestures into the circle.

Then she fell upon her knees by the grave.

The light of the torches which the bearers carried burned much better now they were not in motion, and their light revealed with great distinctness this woman's face and figure.

She was very old. Her skin was wrinkled, and looked yellower than it really was in the dull red glare of the torches. A quantity of thin gray hairs streamed behind her in the wind, and she clasped her wasted, bony hands together with an agonising earnestness.

"Get up, low woman," said Tobias Primp, recovering from his surprise, and advancing towards her. "Get up, and don't interfere with the majesty of the law, or I'll have you locked up, I will."

"No! no! you could not keep a mother from witnessing the interment of her son! I tell you he was my son!" she shrieked. "My son! my own flesh and blood, you understand."

"This is horror upon horror," said Dick; "let us draw back and leave them."

"Never, never," said Tom King. "I will stand by to the last. I cannot prevent them from carrying the sentence of the law into effect, but if they offer that poor creature any ill-usage, they shall rue it."

"You are right, Tom. I forgot the poor mother when I spoke. I will stay."

King pressed his hand in silence.

"Stand back, I say!" again cried Mr. Primp. "Can't

you hear what I said, or did the wind blow, as it were, eh?"

"My boy—my son—my only one!" screamed the old woman, springing suddenly to her feet. "Have mercy! spare him—spare him! Friends, neighbours! help me! help! Do not let them do so frightful a deed! Save my poor boy from that, at least! Save him! Oh! save him!"

No one stirred, though, probably enough, many felt an inclination to do so; but the dread of the consequences of interfering with the carrying out of a judicial sentence kept them back.

"You do not move to help me!" she cried, mangled, despairing tones. "Must a mother pray to you in vain to save her son's remains from a ruthless law! Oh! you who are fathers and have sons of your own, listen to my prayer, save and help him—Ah!"

This last ejaculation was forced from her lips in consequence of finding herself in the grasp of two men who had been directed to seize her.

With as much gentleness as possible these two men led her away from her son's grave.

But her voice, as she shouted for her son to be saved from his terrible doom, for a long time echoed and re-echoed along the highway, but it grew each moment fainter and fainter, until it could be heard no longer.

Then the ponderous hedge-stake was raised in several hands, and swung up and down twice or thrice, so that it should descend with greater force.

It went through the thin elm coffin with a terrible, sickening crash.

At that very moment there descended from the sky a perfect deluge of rain.

It seemed as though an enormous cloud had been suddenly reft open, and its contents allowed to fall bodily upon the earth.

The torches were extinguished instantly.

Then a general movement among those assembled took place.

Those who had been engaged to fill up the grave performed their task with great rapidity.

"Stop a minute, Dick!" said Tom King, as he observed his companion about to withdraw. "Stop a minute! We are drenched to the skin now, and cannot get any wetter, so let us stay and see it all out!"

Turpin uttered a growl of impatience and dissatisfaction, but remained.

In the meantime the grave had been filled up, and the men were now busily engaged in heaping a quantity of pebbly stones round the hedge-stake, which projected some three feet above the level of the road.

"Now I hope you are content!" said Turpin, as he saw the last stone put in its place.

"Yes, I'm ready now," said Tom; "only I made up my mind to see it all out, as being one of the most singular customs in existence."

"Come along, then!" said Dick, setting off at a trot. "Why, I believe the rain gets heavier every moment. It's positively coming down in one sheet."

"Oh! never mind. I dare say you have had your skin wetted before to-day, and when you were not so close to a place of shelter as you are at the present moment."

"That's very true. I wonder how Davis is getting on. I thought he would have got back before this. I am very uneasy and impatient, I can assure you."

"I have no doubt of that, for if you should be unfortunate enough to lose your mare, you will be a long time before you find one to match her."

"I should never find one. It would be an impossibility. When Turpin loses his mare it will be all over with him."

"Well, we shall soon know the result of the landlord's errand, for the inn is not a hundred yards off now. Look, you can see the lights at the front window quite plainly."

"Yes, I can, though, under the impression Davis has not returned, or we should have seen something of him. My heart misgives me very much about it."

"So," suppose, for you speak in quite a desponding way. You may depend it will be all right sooner or later."

"I hope so, indeed!" said Dick, as he pushed open the front door of the "Hand and Keys," and entered, closely followed by his comrade.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN DEPART FOR LONDON ON
THEIR PERILOUS ERRAND.

FROM the noise which greeted the ears of the two highwaymen as they made their way along the passage, it was pretty clear that the old inn was tolerably full of customers. Avoiding, however, the kitchen in which the guests were, both ascended the broad oaken staircase.

Turpin was first, and he halted as soon as he reached the landing.

"Tom," he said, "I needn't tell you how anxious I am about Davis. I wish you would go down again and ascertain whether he has returned. Not that I think he has for a moment, only it would be more satisfactory to be sure he had not."

"I'll go," replied Tom. "None will know me. Stand here till I come back."

"Who shall you ask?"

"Your flame!"

"My flame?"

"Yes, Ellen!"

"Oh!"

"I think she will be the best to make my inquiries of."

"Or Mrs. Davis. It doesn't matter which."

Tom King descended the stairs and went into the bar. It was empty at first, but Mrs. Davis and Ellen entered immediately after him, each carrying several jugs.

The young girl smiled when she saw King.

"You seem busy," he said. "It's an ill wind blows nobody good. Has Davis returned?"

"He has not," said Mrs. Davis, as she wiped her face with her apron. "I wish he was safe back! Did you ever know such a wet night? When he comes he will be drenched to the skin!"

"I was in hopes he had arrived. My friend is very uneasy about him and his mare, so he sent me to inquire while he waited for me on the stairs. Let us know as soon as he returns."

"Very well, good night!"

"Good night!"

"Not come?" interrogated Turpin, as soon as he saw King.

"No! They will send us word the moment he does," Dick sighed.

"I don't like this," he said. "There is danger abroad, or Davis would have been back before this. If he does not come quickly I shall risk all and start myself. Fool that I was to leave Bess behind me. I'll warrant I never do the same thing again."

"You couldn't help yourself, could you? However, I don't wonder at your impatience and anxiety."

"I confess they increase fearfully every moment. There is, however, one thing certain, Bess must be got back somehow or other."

"I suppose so. And the best thing we can do is to go up to our attic and wait a while, and occupy ourselves in devising some scheme to be carried out by ourselves in case Davis should fail."

"You are right, my friend. I wish we had a light though, for this staircase is most confoundingly dark. I can't see where I am going."

"Never mind, feel your way. We shall be right enough when you reach the attic."

"So we shall. Let me lead the way, my friend."

"It will be a case of the blind leading the blind, I fancy, though, of course, you have been oftener up the stairs than I have."

"Rather!"

The highwaymen felt their way slowly up the staircase, and after a little blundering reached the attic.

Both went to the window.

"Throw it open, Dick," said King. "We shall be able to tell, then, what the weather is like, and whether there is anyone on the road."

Turpin obeyed.

A sudden gust of wind, bearing with it a quantity of rain, entered the chamber.

"The weather doesn't seem to have improved, Tom. The sky is as black as ink."

"It is. I fancy, though, the rain has abated a great deal."

"Oh! it has; there is no question about that. It

couldn't come down at that rate long. I never knew anything like it, and I have seen a few showers. Can you see or hear anyone on the road?"

"No; both are out of the question. It is so dark you can't see your hand before you, and just hark how the wind howls!"

A terrific gust swept round the old inn as he spoke, and moaned and whistled as it careered round the corners that obstructed its onward passage.

"Shut the window," said Dick, "and let us come away."

"No: stop! silence!"

"What do you hear?"

"I fancied just then that I heard the tramp of horses' hoofs on the roadway."

Both strained their sense of hearing to the utmost.

"I hear nothing," said Turpin, after a brief pause.

"Nor I, now. And yet I fancied I heard a horse approaching. It must have been fancy merely."

They remained listening a little longer, but as they could hear no repetition of the sound, closed the window.

"I am in a terrible fidget," said Dick, "and I get worse and worse every moment."

"I can scarcely wonder at it, for you see Davis has been gone seven or eight hours now."

"Yes; that is the circumstance that fills me with alarm. I fear Davis has been seized by the police."

"Or," said King, "he may not have left London when the rain began, and is waiting there until the weather is better."

Dick shook his head at the supposition of his friend.

"It is just possible that may be the reason, but I doubt it."

"Well, then, let us suppose Davis has failed. What steps shall you take to get Bess into your possession?"

"I have no idea; but doubtless some mode of action will suggest itself to me at the proper time."

"Well, it's always my system to mature a plan before I start, and then you set about what you have to do with greater ease and confidence."

"That is only true to a certain extent, my friend. So many things occur to alter the aspect of events, that your plan requires perpetual modification, and by the time you have to put it into execution it is quite different to what it originally was."

"I have known such to be the case."

"You must have done. Now I always think it best to set out having only your ultimate purpose in view, and then let circumstances form and suggest your plan of operation."

"Perhaps it is best. But I asked you what you intended to do, simply because I look upon the attempt as an impossibility."

"Do you?"

"I do."

"It is difficult and dangerous, I know, but it does not follow from that it is impossible."

"Well, so far as my own convictions go, I feel quite assured Davis has failed in his errand, and has likely enough been made prisoner as an accomplice. Now if he, a stranger, could not succeed, I don't see what chance you yourself have of doing so."

"I admit all that, but I don't see that it is impossible, nevertheless."

"Well, then, I suppose by that, you have resolved to make the attempt yourself?"

"I have."

"Then I have a request to make of you which you must promise beforehand."

"I can guess what it is before you speak."

"I daresay you can. It is that you will let me accompany you, and share the dangers and difficulties of the enterprise."

"I cannot say no to your request, Tom, because I would rather you went with me. As for the danger, I know you value that no more than I do."

"You are not far off the mark there; but if such is the decision you have made, just allow me to give you a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"To lose no time in carrying out your project."

"I have no intention."

"Then let us start at once. If we do not, we shall have it daylight before we know where we are."

"We shall. Come with me. It will take but a few minutes to get the horses ready for the road."

As he spoke, Turpin left the attic, closely followed by Tom King.

On reaching the bar they paused for a moment, and again inquired whether Davis had returned, and again received a negative reply. Briefly announcing, then, their intention to go in quest of him, they hurried out of the inn, across the yard, and into the stables.

Five minutes afterwards the two highwaymen were mounted and on their way to London.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOM KING FIGHTS A SINGLE COMBAT WITH CHARLES STUART, CALLED IN HISTORY THE YOUNG PRETENDER. THAT this was about the most dangerous expedition Turpin had ever ventured upon there can be little doubt, and though this fact was quite patent to him, it did not cause him to hesitate in the least.

There was some little improvement in the state of the weather perceptible. The rain had almost ceased, and the wind had lost much of its violence.

The roads, though, were in a fearful state, and were very heavy to the horses, for their hoofs sank deeply into the soft clayey soil at every step they took.

The two friends did not speak for some minutes after leaving the yard of the "Hand and Keys." They were too much occupied in picking their way to have leisure to do so.

The night was profoundly dark, so they did not venture to put their horses to a gallop, but they went over the ground at a trot that soon decreased the distance they had to travel.

At length they reached a firmer piece of road, and then Turpin, turning to his companion, said—

"This cool air clears one's faculties. While we have been plodding along, I have been thinking over Tom Davis' non-appearance, and trying to form some hypothesis to account for it."

"Indeed?"

"Yes!"

"Have you succeeded?"

"I fancy so. I seem as though I could tell just what had taken place."

"How do you account for that?"

"I cannot tell, but I have made it out bit by bit, and feel confident I have arrived at the correct solution of the affair."

"It will be a good thing if you have, for, of course, it would lend us most material aid in forming a plan of attack, and determine to a great extent whether we should use stratagem or force."

"I think we shall want a little of both."

"Very good. Let us hear your account of what has happened!"

"Well, you must know first that just before I met you I was betrayed by a waggoner and taken prisoner by some officers."

"Oh! I have heard nothing of this before."

"Dear me, no more you have. Then I shall be obliged to go back to that incident in order to make you understand."

"Well, tell it in as few words as you can, for I am rather impatient by nature, and can't bear to have to wait when I want to hear anything."

"I can assure you it is quite as disagreeable to me as to you. The fact is, as I said before, we must, as soon as we get a chance, relate our histories to each other, and then we shall be able to talk in comfort."

"We shall. You say you were made a prisoner. Never mind the particulars. What next?"

"They were the same officers that pursued you so hotly. There were five of them, and they got about twenty farm labourers to help them, so I did not stand much of a chance with so many."

"I should think not."

"However, when they had bound me, and put me on horseback behind one of the officers, the thought occurred to them how dreadful a thing it would be to have to divide the reward amongst so many."

"Yes, that is only human nature. That over-grasping feeling on the part of the officers has assisted many a one to escape."

"It has; but we will not go into that subject now. The officers then tried to diddle these men, without whom they would never have captured me; so I took advantage of the circumstances to turn the tables upon them."

"How did you do that?"

"In the simplest manner possible. I ordered those men who had captured me ten pounds a-piece to set me free; so they paid into the officers, and did it at once."

"Ha! ha! Capital! That's the best joke I have heard for some time! And how about the officers?"

"I did not let them off scot-free, you may depend, but had them tied back to back, and mounted on their horses."

"Ha! ha! ha! Bravo! Better and better! I shall burst, I know I shall! Ha! ha! How droll they must have looked, one with his face to his horse's head, and the other with his face to his tail! Ha! ha!"

"It would have pleased you most to have heard how they swore when we touched up the cattle, and made them gallop along the road!"

"I should have died, I know I should."

"I did, and so we did all! I kept my word with the men, and gave them not ten pounds but fifteen."

"Then they were in ecstasies with you?"

"They were. I have made a friend of every one of them. But what I was going to say is this: the officer in command was Wriggles. Do you know him? An apoplectic-looking man!"

"I have seen him."

"Well, he is very sweet on catching me; but he wants to do it with as few persons as possible, so as to get the larger share of the reward. Now, in spite of his defeat, I feel convinced it will not be a lesson to him, but he will still try to capture me with his four men. It was he who was put up to my being at the 'Three Tuns,' and, of course, knows Black Bess is stabled somewhere close at hand. Now, his plan of operations will be this. He will look upon that stable as a kind of mousetrap."

"A mousetrap?"

"Yes. He and his officers will take up their stations in the stable, and very patiently lay in wait, and make a prisoner of everyone who enters."

"Dick, my boy, you've hit the right nail on the head this time. You may depend they have caught Davis, and are keeping him there, most likely trusting that those who have sent him will shortly make their appearance."

"That's the conclusion I told you I came to, and you think that is the real state of affairs?"

"I feel certain of it. Somehow it seems to carry conviction with it."

"I am glad you think so. Of course, I could not tell what effect it would have upon your mind. Now, don't you think I was right when I said we should require to use stratagem and force?"

"Quite right. Though, under the circumstances, I should prefer using rather more of the latter than the former."

"It would be best, perhaps. Now, what course should you propose?"

"Well, I hardly know. If it is just as you have supposed, I should be for dashing into the stable, and bringing the mare off by main force."

"So should I, Tom. I like a bold plan of operations. I think we should be a match for Wriggles and his four men."

"Oh! yes. We ought first, if possible, to ascertain whether they are there, and then bounce in suddenly upon them!"

"That will be it; and, being taken by surprise, the battle will be half won!"

"Let us push on a little faster, then, for the sooner we get there the better."

"Yes; but hark!"

"Hark? At what?"

"Can't you hear someone approaching?"

Tom King bent forward in his saddle and listened. "Halt, Dick!" he said. "A horseman is coming from the direction of London!"

As he spoke the sound of the horse's footsteps splashing into the mud and little pools on the roadway came quite plainly to their ears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN PROVE MORE THAN A MATCH
FOR MR. WRIGGLES.

"I say, Tom!"

"Yes, Dick."

"This is a traveller."

"Or Tom Davis!"

"Oh! ah! or Tom Davis."

"What were you going to say?"

"Why—a hem! The business we are on requires despatch."

"Unquestionably."

"But if this should be a traveller, my friend!"

"Yes."

"Do you think we ought to lose the opportunity of doing a little business?"

"Just as you like. Abstractedly I should say no."

"He might carry a rich booty."

"He might."

"And it would be a shame to let it slip through our fingers, wouldn't it?"

"Especially when it wouldn't delay us much one way or the other."

"I think we must stop him, Tom."

"Very well. Look after your priming. Remember it has been raining, and the chances are ten to one the charges have got wet."

King examined his own pistols as he spoke, and Turpin followed his example.

The horseman, be he whom he might, was not now many yards distant. His horse's footsteps could be plainly enough heard, but neither the form of horse nor rider could be distinguished owing to the unusual darkness of the night.

The two highwaymen had halted just in the middle of the road.

Both now were silent, for they did not wish their voices to reach the horseman, and be a means of putting him on his guard.

In another moment he was face to face with King and Turpin.

"Stand!" said the latter, "and deliver what valuables you carry with you peaceably. If you resist, your death be on your own head."

The only reply the traveller made was to draw a sword with lightning rapidity from its scabbard.

It gleamed through the air like a flash of light as it descended, for this traveller aimed a desperate blow at Dick's head with the weapon.

By something little short of a miracle, Dick drew back quick enough to escape the stroke; but the sword, in its descent, sliced a small piece of skin off the neck of his horse.

The pain, doubtless, was excessive, for the animal reared and pranced, and became perfectly unmanageable.

Dick maintained his position in his saddle, though anyone less accustomed to horse-riding than himself would, no doubt, have found it impossible to do so, and he strove to soothe the creature in the best way he could.

The man who had been attacked did not fail to perceive the advantage he had gained, and spurring forward, would doubtless have made short work of Dick had not Tom at that moment interposed his person.

He had drawn the hanger which he habitually carried by his side, and stood still and quietly on guard.

His opponent, he fancied, was in some way connected with the army, both on account of the promptitude with which he made his attack upon Dick, and because occasionally King could see something glittering about his apparel, as though he was attired in an officer's uniform.

On finding himself confronted by King, the traveller did not appear to abate his martial and valorous bearing a jot, but instantly commenced a furious attack upon Tom, who, though an expert swordsman, found himself fully occupied in warding off the heavy blows which were aimed at him.

The conflict continued for many minutes without either party gaining advantage.

The idea that he was fighting with a soldier was strengthened in King's mind by observing what perfect mastery he had over his steed, and, indeed, the manner

in which he made it wheel about was well calculated to call forth surprise and admiration.

And now Turpin, who had succeeded in calming his horse, also drew his hanger, and rode forward to the assistance of his friend.

"Stand back, Dick!" shouted King, making his voice heard above the din of the clashing steel. "Stand back, and let us have fair play! It would be cowardly for both of us to attack a really brave man who is defending what he carries about him."

Without a word, Turpin drew back as requested.

"A rest! a rest!" cried the soldier, if soldier he were, for the first time breaking the silence. "Hold a moment!"

King lowered his weapon.

"You are a brave-hearted man," continued the stranger, restoring his sword to its sheath, and holding out his right hand, "and true courage and bravery are the things I admire most on earth. I know not who you are, except that you are a highwayman, yet, strange as it may seem to you, I should be proud and glad to reckon you my friend. Shake hands!"

Nothing loath, King grasped the hand so friendly held out to him; and said, while Dick looked on in wondering amazement—

"You have behaved yourself most gallantly, and I accept your cordial invitation with the utmost pleasure. Still, you will excuse me if I say that I fancy you have overrated me. Fair play is always my maxim."

"And mine too. And I must say on this occasion you have acted up to it. Here is my purse!"

"No, no," said Tom King. "Keep it! I would not take it from you for worlds!"

"I insist upon it," said the stranger, endeavouring to force a well-filled purse into his hands. "You might, if you liked, have set upon me with your companion, and deprived me of my life; for if your friend is as accomplished a swordsman as yourself, I should not have stood the ghost of a chance with you. I had much ado to defend myself as it was."

"You are very frank, sir," said King, still avoiding the proffered gift, "and I admire you for it. I must, however, refuse to accept anything from you."

"Well, then, if you will not, probably your comrade will. Here, you Sir Highwayman No. 2, here is a purse of guineas which I wish you to accept as a present for the forbearance you have exercised. Take, and be welcome!"

Turpin made a deprecating gesture.

"The case is entirely in the hands of my friend," he said, "and I must decline to interfere with it. So you must excuse me if I refuse."

The stranger returned the purse to his pocket with rather an offended air.

"Then, gentlemen—for by your manners and bearing such you are—since you will not allow me to do anything to show my gratitude for your forbearance, perhaps you will allow me to proceed on my journey."

He gathered the reins in his hands as he spoke, and touched his steed with his spur.

"One moment!" said King, placing himself directly in his way.

"What is your wish?"

"We have already passed sufficient compliments, I think," replied King; "yet, still for my own part, I have said no more than your gallant behaviour prompted me to say. I would scorn to take anything from you but your name, and that, I confess, I have the greatest desire to know. Will you give it me?"

The stranger hesitated a few moments before he spoke.

"My name," he said, "is a secret. I am hunted and proscribed, and many are thirsting for my life! I do not like to refuse you anything, and yet"—

"It appears to me," said Tom King, "that your position in that respect is very much like our own."

"It is; but most unjustly," replied the stranger, a tone of sadness tinging his words. "My position should be among the highest in the land."

A deep sigh came from his lips as he finished speaking.

Both Turpin and King were perfectly absorbed in their strange adventure.

The latter broke the silence.

"We will not press you," he said; "but still I think you may safely trust us with your name."

"Perhaps so, and if I do, a day may come when I shall be glad to avail myself of your assistance. The

simple fact of your being fugitives like I am, emboldens me to confide in you. You will be surprised when I declare myself! But before I do, tell me your names."

"Mine," said Tom, "is tolerably well known. It is Tom King."

"Tom King, the highwayman?"

"Even so."

"You surprise me, for I expected to find the person who bore that name an unmitigated ruffian, capable of every atrocity."

"Thank you!" said Tom, daily.

"Excuse me," remarked the gentleman. "I only said what sort of character had been represented to me under your name."

"Oh! no offence—no offence!"

"And your companion," continued the stranger.

"He must answer for himself."

Dick drew a little closer to the speakers.

"My name," he said, as he raised his hat and made a most elaborate bow, "is Richard—commonly called Dick—Turpin!"

"Indeed! I little expected I was in the company of two such celebrated characters, and, after receiving your confidence, I cannot withhold mine; besides, I am quite sure now I shall have nothing to fear from you."

"We will give you our assurance," said Turpin and King, both speaking at once. "We will give you our assurance that your name shall never be revealed by us unless with your consent."

"Agreed, then. Listen! I have two names by which I am equally well known. One is Charles Stuart, and the other is—"

"THE YOUNG PRETENDER!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER FINDS TWO STAUNCH ADHERENTS.

The two highwaymen drew back a few paces when this name fell upon their ears, and though, generally speaking, they were disposed to show but scant reverence for royalty, yet, when this announcement was made, they involuntarily backed their horses a few yards, and raised their hats respectfully.

The name of the unfortunate young man was, of course, well known to both, and they were also familiar with the many reverses he had suffered. It is, therefore, to be presumed that his chivalry and gallantry, and the fact of his being hunted by almost all the world, conspired chiefly to cause a feeling of friendship for him to arise in their breasts which they would not otherwise have felt.

"My friends," said the Young Pretender in his calm, rich voice, "do not draw back, I beg. Think in how many ways you resemble he who is rightfully your king, but who is now no more than you in station. Like you, I am compelled to travel in disguise and when the sun has withdrawn his face. I am surrounded on every side by enemies who are thirsting for my life, I am compelled to be ever watchful—ever in dread of treachery. In all these respects must I—a king by birth and right—resemble you!"

These words were uttered in a tone of deep, inexpressible pathos, tinged with a soul-absorbing sadness; and as he gave utterance to his reflections, he became conquered by his emotion, and his head drooped upon his breast.

His words, manner, bearing, all combined to raise a feeling of sympathy in his behalf on the part of our two friends.

They were silent for a moment or so, and then Tom King broke the silence.

"Your highness," he said, "among all those who profess themselves your adherents, there is not one so true, so faithful, so devoted, as myself. I consider your right to the throne of England as most indisputable, and only too gladly will I do all I can to advance your cause. You will allow, sire, that the position in which I am placed will prevent my doing much."

"Pardon me," said Stuart. "You have addressed me by a title which, at present, is not my own: though I hope some day it will be. Still, there is an old Scottish superstition which says, 'It is unlucky to give anyone a title before it actually belongs to him.'"

"I am sorry, my prince," replied King, "that I have been led into an indiscretion. Let me hope that you will receive my promise of allegiance to you."

"I do! I do! And yet to-night!"

He paused abruptly.

Neither King nor Turpin liked to speak, as a silence ensued, which they could see much embarrassed the young prince.

He got out of his difficulty by finishing the sentence he had checked himself in uttering.

"To-night," he said, "secretly and in disguise, I made a visit to the metropolis. I was induced thereto by those who had professed by oaths and protestations that they were devoted solely to my cause. Base hearts! It was a deeply-laid scheme for my capture and destruction, but by great good fortune I succeeded in eluding them, and have so far escaped in safety."

"I trust, my prince," said King, gravely, "that you will never do me the injustice to think of me in the same breath with them. You must see that it is no interest of mine, that I have no motive for siding with you save the true one, and that is, I consider, if monarchy must be a national institution, you, as the descendant of the Stuarts, possess a far better right to the throne than any German family."

"That's just exactly it," said Turpin, speaking for the first time, for hitherto he felt that respect for young Charles Stuart prevented the interruption of the conversation he was holding with Tom King. "Excuse me, my prince, but King, my comrade here, expressed so well my own convictions, that I could not forbear saying so."

"There is nothing to excuse," said the Pretender, gently. "Heaven knows every friend now is a friend indeed, and you must accept such thanks as I can offer. Believe me, I am most grateful to you both."

This was said with so much sweetness of tone, and such charming grace, that it was impossible for anyone not to be charmed with it.

"We will endeavour to merit your thanks," said Turpin, "and hope that the day is not far distant when we shall have the satisfaction of hailing you King of England!" The eyes of the Young Pretender brightened.

"When I am," he said, "I will take care you quit a mode of life which is not worthy of you; you shall both have a position in my establishment."

"We are well enough content with our lot," said Dick, "and having once commenced warring with society, as we have, the struggle must be continued until one of us is vanquished!"

"You reject my offer. But I forget. I am not yet in a position to make it to you! I have been betrayed into a weakness. Farewell!"

As he spoke, Charles Stuart again took the reins in his hand, and rode forward.

The two highwaymen drew aside to enable him to pass.

"I am going now to Scotland," he said, "where I hope soon to raise my standard. Will you join me when I do?"

"With all the pleasure in life. We would accompany you now to preserve you from danger, but business of the most urgent nature, and which will admit of no delay, calls us to London."

"Farewell, then," said Charles Stuart. "We part with the understanding that, as soon as you hear I am raising an army, you will place yourselves under my banner!"

"That is it," said Tom; "and rest assured we will render you all the service in our power."

"Since, then, you will not accept the purse, and which now I am sorry I ever offered you, permit me to place upon each of your right hands a ring, which will enable me to recognise you upon a future occasion."

"Willingly, my prince."

The highwaymen held out their hands, and the young Pretender placed upon each a ring of considerable value.

"I shall recognise you now," he said, "and, for the third time, let me say farewell! Day-dawn is now close at hand, and I must hasten my journey, or I may even yet be overtaken by my foes. Farewell!"

"Farewell, my prince, and may the time soon come when we can hail you King of England!"

Charles Stuart lifted his hat, and striking his spurs into his horse's sides, galloped swiftly along the road.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FIGHT IN THE STABLE BETWEEN THE OFFICERS
AND THE HIGHWAYMEN.

The two friends for some moments pursued in silence their interrupted journey.

The adventure they had just had was provocative of thought.

But Dick, as we know, was a person who could never go far in anyone's company without indulging in conversation.

"How silent you are, Tom! Has this young enthusiasm made so deep an impression on your mind?"

"He has, I must confess. I was thinking what a singular thing it was that we should have met each other as we did."

"A strange chance. I like him much, for we have had proof to-night that, if he is gentle in his manners, he can be, when he wishes, as brave as a lion."

"Yes; I do not think that I ever had so much difficulty to defend myself from anyone before. You know I pride myself very much upon my skill with the sword."

"He was almost a match for you. But come, Tom, my friend, quicken your speed. Have you forgotten our errand?"

"For the moment I had. There is no time to lose, for look, already in the east is a faint line of light."

"There is. I can see it plainly, so daybreak must be close at hand; but, let the peril be what it will, I am determined not to pass another day separated from my bonny mare."

"One thing, we are not far from our destination. A quarter of an hour, I fancy, will be enough to carry us there."

"If we make good speed, it will. But is it not singular we should have both met, and joined the Pretender's side?"

"Yes. I am rather surprised at you, Dick, for I always thought you were a staunch opposer of sovereignty and such like."

"So I am, Tom, so I am. I only sided with him because it always comes natural for me to side with the weak against the strong."

"Oh! that was it, was it?"

"It was; but still, as you yourself said, so far as title to the throne goes, I do consider he has a much better right to it than any German by any possibility can have."

"You are right there. That's just what I think; and if I can do anything towards making him king, I shall do it."

"And I will help you," said Turpin, "for the short time I was with him sufficed for him to win my heart."

"I am rather puzzled, though, at his behaviour. One would hardly have thought he would have made friends with us as he did. You may depend he has met with some great grief to-night that has chastened and subdued his heart."

"Without a doubt. Did he not say as much to you in the course of the conversation he had with you?"

"He did. He said those who had professed themselves sworn friends to his cause and party had lured him into a snare for his destruction. But come, here we are in London at last."

"I think, Tom, it will only be prudent to slacken speed a little as we go through the streets, or we shall create suspicion."

"You are right. And now, have you matured your plan?"

"No; that I have not. Too many things have occurred. Stop, and let me have five minutes' thought, and do you try if you can arrange some plan of operations."

Both relapsed into silence.

They were now threading their way through the densely-populated district lying north of Holborn. Although it was so early in the morning, many people were walking through the streets.

At length, without uttering another word, the two highwaymen drew up close by Montague House, which has been transformed into that handsome building, the British Museum.

"Well, Tom, what is it?"

"I was just considering which would be best: to leave

the cattle somewhere about here, or ride up to the 'Three Tuns.'"

"The latter, I think, and I'll tell you why. If I had not separated from Bess, I should not have had to run through the streets for my life as I did."

"That's true. Then you say ride forward?"

"Yes."

The horses were once more put in motion, and when they again halted it was opposite the mouth of the alley in Seven Dials leading to the stable in which Black Bess had been placed.

A poor shivering, ragged urchin was shuffling along the street, and Dick beckoned him to come towards him.

"Do you think you could take care of these two horses for a few minutes if I gave you a shilling for doing so?"

"A shilling. Oh! could I not rather. Why, holding 'ooses is how I gets my living. I only wishes I could get a shilling off everybody!"

"Well, you shall off me if you mind the horses well, and so you will off my friend here, I know."

"Two shillings!" said the boy, as he made a dart at the bridles. "Oh! won't I have a breakfast, neither!"

The two friends alighted from their horses.

"Walk them gently up and down," said Dick to the boy; "but don't lead them far away. When we come back, we shall want them in a hurry very likely."

"All right, your honour," said the boy, touching his cap.

"Now, Dick," said Tom King, "as you know the ins and outs of this place, and I don't, perhaps you will take the lead."

"I will. Follow me. I have made up my mind to a bold course of action."

"That's right. I like a bold plan best; it always has a better chance of succeeding!"

"Well, my plan is very simple. I assume, in the first place, that Bess is in this stable, and that the officers are there waiting for anyone who may come to fetch her."

"Well?"

"I intend, with your co-operation, to make a bold rush into the stable, overcome all resistance, lead out Black Bess, mount her, and be off, laughing at all pursuit."

"The plan is, I must say, bold enough in all conscience. Still, I like it, and there is every chance of its being successful."

"I am glad you think so. Now, halt a minute! Just round the corner to the right is the stable."

"Oh!"

"Now, quietly! Hark!"

"What's that?"

"A footstep. Cannot you hear it?"

"Yes, now quite plainly. Who can it be, I wonder?"

"I have no idea. Draw back a little, and we will see. If it is an officer we must pounce upon him, and make him a prisoner at once."

The two friends got as close to the wall of the alley as they could, and waited.

The footstep approached.

It was a lounging, careless one, as though the walker was in no particular hurry, but merely idling about to pass away the time.

In another moment, now, a strange compound between a man and a boy came round the corner from the direction of the stable.

"Oh! it's all right," said Dick. "It's only Alf!"

"Alf? Who's Alf?"

"Why, the man who looks after the horses. How fortunate we have met him."

"Why?"

"We can get all the information we require that is necessary to make our plan perfect."

"Is he faithful?"

"As a dog. I would trust him to any extent."

"Then, if that is the case, it is indeed fortunate we have met him."

"Hi! Alf! Here!" said Dick, in a suppressed voice, and putting half-a-crown into his eye as our fops now-a-days fix their eye-glasses. "Hi! Alf! Come this way."

The ostler looked up as he heard these words, and his face lighted up with pleasure when he saw Turpin.

He threw off his lounging, shuffling gait, and advanced quickly towards him.



[TURPIN AND KING ATTACK THE OFFICERS IN THE STABLE.]

"Good morning, Alf," said Turpin, dropping the half-crown into his hand. "I want a little information from you this morning."

"All right, your honour. I can guess what it is."

"Oh, you can?"

"Yes. It's about your mare that you left here the night before last."

"It is. Quick! tell me. Is she safe and unharmed in the stable where I left her?"

"She be as right as a trivet; but —"

"Thank fate, so far. But what?"

"Well, I'm glad I found you, for, do you know, I have been thinking about you all night, and just as I was deepest in thought about you, I heard you call me."

"Yes, that's right enough. But what were you going to say?"

"Why, Bess is in the stable safe enough. There's old Wriggles and four officers with him taking care that no one fetches her away."

"Just as I told you, Tom."

"Eh?" said Alf.

"Oh! nothing. I merely remarked to my friend here, that things had fallen out just as I supposed they would. By-the-bye, how and when did Mr Wriggles and his men arrive?"

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed the ostler heartily, and yet in so subdued a way that at a few yards' distance it would have been unheard. "Ha! ha! ha! The werry best joke as ever I heard on. Oh! Squire, you is a rum 'un, you is."

"How did they come?"

"You know how they come. Ha! ha!"

"I know how I started them."

"They come here on horseback, tied back to back."

"Oh! they did?"

"Yes, and when I seed them they looked so outrageous comical that I laid down and rolled in the yard, and fairly cried."

"With laughter?"

"Yes. Oh! you should have just seen what a rage Mr. Wriggles was in. His face was black——"

"Good heavens!"

"As a nigger's."

"Was there a countryman with them?"

"A market waggoner?"

"Yes."

"There was."

"And what about him?"

"Oh! poor fellow, he was in a dreadful way. I really felt quite sorry for him."

"Why?"

"Oh! he said you had ruined him. He should lose his place, his vegetables would spoil, and he should get looked up for the damage done. If you had not got off, he said, it would not have mattered, because he would have had the reward."

"Really, I am quite sorry I did not give in at once, for his sake."

"I dessay you is."

"Is he in the stable with Wriggles?"

"Bless you, no sir! Old Wriggles is a hartful card. If he was in a towering passion, he did not lose his wits. The waggoner knew nothing about Black Bess being in the stable here, though Mr. Wriggles did, so he went off to look after his waggon and team."

"I should think he will stick to it infut ure. It will be a les son to him. Fool that he was, he might have had a handsome sum for giving me a ride to London. I should not have begrudged it him."

"I knows as how you wouldn't, squire. You never begrudges nothink."

"Well, then, this waggoner has gone?"

"Oh! yes. Like the boy's eye."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, squire. We haven't seen nothink ofehim."

"That's all right, then. He would have been an awkward customer at close quarters. And now, Alf, we may as well know all about it. Wha did Mr. Wriggles do after the waggoner had gone?"

"Swore above six, and then drank four glasses of brandy!"

"What then?"

"Why, he said as how the stable would prove a first-rate trap, and that he should nab you as sure as eggs ain't bacon, for you would be certain to come after Black Bess!"

"Just how I told you he would reason," said Dick, turning to Tom King.

"Exactly. Go on, Alf!"

"Well, all five of them went into the stable along with the mare, and there they have been ever since."

"How do they employ their time?"

"Oh! they're all right. What with eating, drinking, and telling tales, the time passes pleasantly enough."

"And now, one thing more. Did anyone come here after Black Bess?"

"Yes, a fat man!"

"How did he get on?"

"Why, they nabbed him."

"Have they got him in the stable now?"

"Yes, tied hand and foot!"

"Poor Tom!"

"I was not about when he came, or else I should have given him the office; but he walked into the stable half soaked, and so nabbed he was!"

"How very odd, Tom. It turns out precisely as I said it would."

"It does!"

"Now, Alf, look here!"

"I is looking."

"This gentleman and myself are going to fetch the mare out of the stable, and give the officers a thrashing."

"That's the ticket! And you want me to help," said Alf, turning up his sleeves, and squaring with his fists.

"No, not exactly. That would only get you into trouble. I have got a boy outside with two other horses. Now, you would render me a service, and a great one, if you would keep an eye upon him, for it may, perhaps, be important that they should be cloee at hand."

"I'll see to it, squire; so that's one trouble less on your mind."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for you are a faithful fellow, and will, I know, keep your word."

"You are right there, squire; but shouldn't I like to help you slip into the officers. Oh! stockings!"

Dick and Tom could not help laughing at Alf as he jumped about the alley, as though engaged with some formidable antagonist.

"Mind the horses Alf, my boy, and you shall have a guinea for your trouble."

"Right! Stand here a minute, and I'll just have a peep."

Alf ran to the mouth of the alley, and then returned.

"Right he is! That boy'll mind 'em all right. I knows him. Now, squire, look here, I can put you up to a dodge!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

TURPIN AGAIN MOUNTS HIS BONNY MARE.—HURRAH FOR A LIFE ON THE ROAD!

"WELL, Alf," asked Dick, as the ostler approached him with a mysterious yet triumphant air, "what is it?"

"A scheme!"

"To get the mare out?"

"Yes."

"And Tom Davis?"

"Who?"

"The fat man they made prisoner."

"Oh! ah! yes! Him as well."

"That's the style, Alf. Let us hear what it is!"

"No, never mind telling you. Just follow me, and I'll show you what it is."

Alf made his way along the alley, and round the corner leading to the stables.

He was closely followed by the two highwaymen.

"Hush!" he said, and he held up his finger for silence.

They trod on tip-toe.

The sound of a voice singing a song in stentorian tones came upon their ears.

"They're making themselves jolly, ain't they?" whispered Alf.

"It seems like it."

"Now, squire, look here. Do you see that round hole there?"

"In the wall, over the stable?"

"Yes."

"I can just see it; but it's so dark."

"All the better. Well that round hole looks out of the hay-loft over Bess's stables."

"I know it does."

"Werry good! Now, do you see this ladder?"

"I understand," said Dick. "You want me to put the ladder up to the hole, and make my way into the stable that road?"

"Egzaactly, squire. When you gets up in the hay-loft, creep along carefully to the left, and then you'll come to the stairs leading to the stable. Down 'em you go like a shot. The officers is taken by surprise, and in consequence loked—you mout Black Bess, and off you go like a bird!"

"It ain't half a bad scheme, Alf, and I shall put it into execution."

Alf looked pleased.

"As, however," continued Dick, "absolute silence is indispensable, and you are used to moving ladders and I ain't, I will just get you to put that one up to the hole in the loft, and then we will manage the rest. What do you think of the scheme, Tom?"

"Why, I think it is a very good one. They won't dream of our making an entrance through the loft, and so the whole of their attention will be given to the door. What a voice that fellow has, to be sure."

Just as he spoke, the end of a verse had been reached, and then the whole joined in chorus, apparently with great gusto.

Alf took this opportunity to place the ladder against the wall, and the highwaymen mounted it, and were standing in the hay-loft before the chorus was concluded.

According to arrangement, Alf went to the street, so as to look after the boy with the horses.

Comparative silence prevailed after the song was finished, so Turpin and King stood profoundly still. It was no part of their plan to let the officers know they were there before they actually stood before them.

A great quantity of straw was scattered about the floor

of the loft, so they were afraid to make the least movement lest the rustling should betray their presence.

"Now, Instone," they heard a voice say, in thick, guttural accents, "it's your turn now, so tip us a good one!"

"Yes, Mr. Wriggles," they heard a voice respond, which they reasonably enough supposed belonged to Instone. "I'll try my best, sir, if you please."

"Order for Instone! Silence, gentlemen, silence."

Mr. Instone now began to troll forth a song, which, however first-rate it may have appeared to his companions, does not, in our eyes, merit reproduction here.

The highwaymen waited again for the chorus, and at last their patience was rewarded.

Quick as thought, for the dawn of the new day was stealing into the sky, and their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, Dick and Tom made their way to the staircase Alf the ostler had described.

It did not deserve the name of staircase, for it was simply a rude kind of ladder, nailed against the wall.

"Now, Dick," whispered Tom, "look to your pistols!"

"All right!"

"Mine are in good order and fit for instant service. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Come on then, at once."

As he spoke these words he descended the ladder with the agility of a monkey.

He reached the ground a second or so before Turpin, but that was all.

They did not pause a moment, but yet they had time to see they were in a long stable divided into several boxes, and that the officers were seated in one opposite the front door.

Uttering a loud shout, which, coming so unexpectedly as it did, struck a panic into the hearts of the officers, Turpin and King crossed the stable.

A table had, by the order of Mr. Wriggles, been carried into it, and around this the officers were seated.

They rose in confusion.

The two highwaymen were among them in a moment.

Then commenced the most desperate struggle that can be well conceived.

The officers had, in point of numbers, the advantage; but our friends, by their determination and energy, soon made the chances equal.

"Give it them, Tom, my boy! On to them! Make them remember this to the last day of their lives. That's it! Down you go!"

The deep potations in which the officers had been indulging diminished the resistance they would have made, though the heavy, straightforward blows which King administered appeared to have a sobering effect.

Mr. Wriggles fought, screamed, yelled, and danced like a madman.

"Take them!" he said. "Capture them! The one is Dick Turpin and the other is Tom King! Take them both, and then what a glorious reward will fall into our hands! Now, Instone, quick to the door! Don't let them escape!"

Instone made a rush to the door, which Turpin was trying to unfasten and fling open, but a terrific blow in the face from Dick's fist laid him prostrate on the ground.

The next minute the door was open.

A gentle light was now diffused through the stable, which enabled Dick to see the state of affairs much better.

Tom Davis saw was bound hand and foot, but looking upon the highwaymen's proceedings with considerable satisfaction.

While Tom was busily combating those officers who could stand upon their feet, Dick made his way towards Davis, and, taking a clasp-knife from his pocket, cut the bonds by which he was secured.

The landlord's limbs were terribly cramped from being so long in one position, and he was some minutes before he properly regained the use of them.

"Get hold of Bess, Davis, my boy, and lead her out into the yard," whispered Dick, "while I give these fellows here a little more physic. I can see Tom will be glad of my assistance."

So saying, Turpin plunged into the thicket of the night, leaving Davis to execute his orders.

The officers certainly tried very hard to conquer their assailants, but in vain. No doubt the desperate resistance they made was owing to the exasperation they felt at being so often defeated.

But they were doomed to be defeated once more, for, just as Turpin heard Davis lead his mare out into the yard, he found there were only two officers in a state to show fight.

Dick took one and King the other.

They made short work of them, and they were quickly lying by the side of their companions.

The victory was complete; and, though knives had been drawn and pistols fired, yet none of the combatants had received any injury save that derived from their fists. They found them the most convenient weapons at close quarters.

Turpin and King had, of course, made themselves proficient in every means of defence; so, as they were both excellent boxers and wrestlers, as well as being sober and determined, they could scarcely fail to gain the victory they did, although their foes were so superior to them in numbers.

All five of the officers, Mr. Wriggles included, lay upon the floor of the stable more or less in a state of insensibility.

"Whew, Tom!" cried Turpin, as he wiped the perspiration from his face and went into the yard. "It was warm work, but we have succeeded in our object. Are you hurt?"

"Bruised and battered a little, that's all; but I am unwounded, if that's what you mean."

"I say, though, we ought not to leave them like this. Let's lock them in the stable."

"Good! It shall be done."

King turned the key in the lock.

"I suppose Davis has led Bess into the street along with the other horses. Come on at once; I shall feel another man when I am once more upon her back."

"The change will soon take place," said King, as both hurried along the yard, and round the corner of the alley; "for look, there is Davis just under the archway!"

"And holding Black Bess by the bridle," exclaimed Turpin. "Hurrah! I am a man once more!"

So saying, he ran down the alley, and flinging his arm round his mare's neck, stroked her head and face with his hand.

The noble creature evidently recognized him again, for she uttered a short, low neigh of satisfaction, and returned her master's caress by rubbing her nose into his hand, and on to the sleeve of his coat.

"Now I hope you're happy, Dick," said Tom Davis, after watching the greeting between the highwayman and his steed. "Is your heart at rest?"

"It is, Davis. I don't care a straw now for anything or anybody! One! two! three!"

As he uttered the word "three," Turpin placed his hands on the back of Black Bess, and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

The magnificent animal, so soon as she felt her rider on her back, pranced and reared in the narrow street. She had been so long cooped up that she longed for a gallop into the country.

"Gently, mare, gently!" said Dick. "I will give you the rein presently, and then off you shall go as fast and as far as you like! I shall be better able to appreciate your value now, Bess!"

In the meantime King had taken his seat on the back of his own steed.

"Here, Davis," cried Turpin, "I should advise you to get back to Hornsey as soon as you can. You can take the horse that brought me hither. It is one belonging to Mr. Wriggles's troop, so mount it, and be off!"

"I will, lad, for I can't walk back again. Woa! easy now!"

"With a great deal of exertion, Mr. Davis managed to get into the saddle."

"I think it will be best for us to separate, Davis; so take my thanks with you for the service you have done me."

"Oh, don't mention it. I have done nothing."

"Remember me to Ellen and your missus. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye."

Mr. Davis trotted off down St. Andrew's street.

"Now, Alf, look alive, my boy, for I want to be going. Here's a guinea for your trouble and assistance."

"Thanks, your honour," said Alf, touching the peak of his cap.

"And give this half-crown to the boy for minding the horses."

"I will. Here, David, here's half-a-crown for you!"

The boy, who had probably never before had so large a sum in his possession at one time, looked at the coin with quite an incredulous air.

"It's a good one," said Dick, "try it."

The boy put it between his teeth, and then, apparently satisfied that it was not counterfeit, vanished round the corner of the street.

Turpin and King laughed heartily.

"Off with you, square, at once," cried Alf, who was standing just in the alley; "off with you. I'm blest if old Wriggles hasn't broke down the door of the stable. Here he comes."

With a perfect rush, Mr. Wriggles, followed by one of his men, shot out of the alley into the roadway.

He had recovered to some extent from the effects of the injuries he had sustained in the encounter, but his face was considerably damaged.

Two or three streaks of very dark-coloured blood crossed his empurpled visage, which detracted greatly from his personal appearance.

"Help! help!" he cried, in gasping, gurgling tones.

"Dick Turpin and Tom King, the highwaymen! Two thousand pounds reward!"

The two friends easily got out of his way, but halted a few yards off.

"Two thousand pounds!" said Mr. Wriggles, "two thousand pounds. Perkins, you fool, why don't you run and catch hold of their bridles?"

Mr. Perkins shook his head ruefully, and with the air of a man who has had quite enough of hard knocks and to spare.

"We had better be off, Dick," said Tom King, "or we shall have all the neighbourhood about our ears."

"It will be quite as prudent."

He gathered the reins in his hand, but before he started he turned round and said, in a loud voice—

"Good-bye, Wriggles, my friend. Good-bye! You may as well give up, for you will never nab me. Take a lesson from experience, and don't be a fool any more. Good-bye!"

Seeing how his prey was slipping through his fingers restored to Mr. Wriggles the power of his voice.

"Seize him! Seize him! A highwayman! Two thousand pounds reward!"

"My eye!" said Alf, the ostler, as he saw the highwayman gallop off towards Charing Cross. "Ain't you coming it strong?"

Muttering a volley of oaths of the most frightful description, and tearing the hair from his head by handfuls, Mr. Wriggles made his way back to the stable of the "Three Tuns."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MEET WITH AN ADVENTURE ON THEIR WAY TO THE NEW FOREST.

It was broad daylight, and the sun's rays were tinting the eastern sky when the two highwaymen trotted down Cranbourne-street into Piccadilly.

They deemed it advisable, as there were no signs of pursuit, not to go at a greater speed.

The chances were, if they did, that they would immediately attract attention, and this was a thing they never wished to do.

"Well, now, Dick, we have taken the right road. Have you determined upon setting out on our country excursion at once?"

"I think it will be quite as well, eh! Tom?"

"Most assuredly."

"Oh! I know you are very anxious about it. I expect you have some particular motive, as you are so eager."

"I have not, in itself, except that I am quite tired of London, and feel as though I should like an entire change—go somewhere, in fact, where I had never been before."

"It will be pleasant enough, no doubt. And, another thing, I have had quite enough of Mr. Wriggles to last me for some time; and as, in his vexation, he will doubt-

less do something desperate, I think, for peace and safety sake, we ought to go."

"So do I, too. You may depend it will be first-rate, and perhaps I shall get a chance of hearing your history?"

"Oh! yes. I promised to relate my early career. I will, too. It's rather a sad story, so I tell you beforehand."

"So is mine."

"Dear me, Tom, was that you?"

"What me?"

"That spoke in that dreadful tone."

"It was. I was unconscious of the change in my voice, but I suppose it was caused by the thoughts that were passing through my mind at the moment."

"They were not very pleasant ones, then, I should think."

"You are right there; they were not, indeed. However, it is quite certain we cannot tell our stories on horse-back."

"Not exactly. I shall be glad when we get free of the houses, and then we will have a call-up."

"Which will put an end to all conversation."

"It certainly will. Tom, my friend, I feel lighter-hearted than I have done for many and many a day. I have got my priceless Bess back again, and you may rest assured it will be a long time before I part with her. I am longing for the moment to come when I can let the reins fall upon her neck, and allow her to go at what speed she pleases."

"Is it not a lovely morning?" said King, as the sun rose above the houses, and cast his warm beams upon the roadway. Think how bright and green the fields and hedgerows will look."

"They will. To me there is something very beautiful about the appearance of the country at early morn, when there has been some rain the night before."

"Well, we are close to Knightsbridge now. What do you say to sweeping along a little?"

"With all my heart. Off and away!"

The speed the two highwaymen made during the next few minutes was something prodigious, and they got over the ground at a great rate.

But King's horse, although a most magnificent animal, could not keep pace with Black Bess, who, taking immensely long leaps, sped along with astonishing swiftness.

"Pull in a bit, Dick—pull in!" Tom said. "I can't possibly keep pace with you, and in a minute or two more I shall be half a mile behind."

Upon hearing these words from his friend, Dick reined Bess in, and allowed King to come up with him.

"It's no good your going at that rate," cried Tom.

"I should never have believed, though famous for speed as your mare is, that she could have outstripped my horse in such a short distance as this."

"I am convinced, Tom, that there is not a steed in England that could match her either in a long or a short gallop. You have not yet seen what speed she can really go at."

"I can form a tolerable idea. But, come, what course do you propose to take?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. You mentioned a rather wide district, and I am making my way towards it."

"Just so! Suppose, now, we were to take the Southampton road!"

"I have no objection to make. I should fancy it would be a very profitable place."

"And so should I. Nothing would delight me more than to ease some fire-eating old admiral of his cash."

"Then we are almost sure to meet with one. You have decided upon Southampton?"

"Yes. I don't know any town that would suit so well. What is the state of the exchequer?"

"Oh! tolerable. There's all the booty, except a few guineas, that we took out of the western coach."

"We are not in immediate want, then?"

"By no means; but still we ought not to let anything go by us in the shape of business."

"Oh! no. I am getting very hollow though, so I propose we stop at some house of entertainment hereabouts. Do you know of any?"

Turpin reflected for a minute.

"About five miles further on there is a house I have called at once or twice?"

"What is the sign?"

"The 'Samson and Lion.'"

"Do you know the landlord?"

"Slightly. He is a very superior kind of person to country innkeepers generally, and has evidently at some previous time occupied a very different position to what he does now. I have never treated him with my name. He knows me only as a chance traveller."

"So much the better. There is the greater chance of our being unmolested."

"There is. Shall you make a stay there?"

"I think not! Why should we?"

"Oh! I see no reason why, only I did not know what your intentions were."

"Why, to push along as fast as possible. We have not seen any signs of pursuit, and really it is such an unusual thing for us to travel by daylight, that I quite enjoy the luxury."

"So do I, and we will indulge in it for some time to come. How long do you think it will take us to reach our destination?"

"It all depends how much we are delayed. I should think some time to-morrow."

"That will suit; and there, just look, a little in advance on the right-hand side of the road there is the 'Samson and Lion.'"

"That large thatched building so surrounded by trees?"

"Yes."

"What a beautiful place! Do you know, Dick, I could make myself very comfortable as landlord of a place like that. Could you?"

"Well, I can't say I could, for it would be too inactive a life to suit me."

"It would have that against it. I suppose you will be better pleased when we place ourselves under the pretender's standard."

"Are you really in earnest about that?"

"I was never more so in my life. Have I not promised? and I never break my word."

"Then, if you go, I am quite willing to accompany you."

"It will be a stirring life for a time, and a good thing for us if he ascends the throne."

"No doubt of that, but the chances of his doing so are, I am afraid, rather slight."

"We must do our best," said King, as they both alighted from their horses, and gave the reins into the hands of a man who was lounging about, and, from his general appearance, connected with the stables.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DICK'S DESCRIPTION OF THE CHARACTER OF THE LANDLORD OF THE "SAMSON AND LION" TURNS OUT TO BE VERY ERRONEOUS.

"Now, ostler," said Dick, "we are going to stay here a little time, and want these cattle taken care of the while."

The ostler turned the piece of straw he held between his lips over and over several times, during which operation he closely scrutinized our two friends and their steeds.

"Look sharp!" said Tom, impatiently. "We don't want to wait an hour."

"Who wants you?" said the ostler, gruffly. "I never axed you to wait! There's the front door, and if you want anything you'll find Mr. Waghorn in the bar."

"You'd best not be impudent, Mr. Ostler," said Turpin. "I'm waiting to see these horses taken into the stable and properly fed."

"Oh! you is, is you? Don't you wish you may get it! We never allows no strangers in our stables."

Turpin was about to make some angry rejoinder, when King stayed him.

"My friend, you don't seem over civil, but just listen to me!"

The ostler turned the straw in his mouth, but said nothing.

"You'll find it to your advantage, I fancy," said King. "We are a couple of gentlemen who think very highly

of our cattle, and, therefore, make it a practice of seeing they are properly attended to, which is never anything out of the ostler's way."

King drew a crown-piece from his pocket as he spoke, and placed it in the ostler's hand.

The touch of the silver upon his palm produced a magical effect upon his behaviour, for he said, with great deference—

"I see, now, you is gentlemen, though at first sight you don't look it, either of you!"

Turpin and King both regarded each other, and then noticed the disordered state of their apparel, after which they ceased to wonder at the ostler's suspicious.

"The fact is, my friend," said King, "we got into a little bit of a scrape, last night. That's a thing, you know, which often happens to gentlemen."

The surly ostler deigned to smile.

"Follow me, gentlemen," he said. "You shall see your horses fed, and I'll warrant I do it to your satisfaction."

"You will, if you comply with our directions. We have our own idea about feeding them, and I dare say it differs from yours."

"All right, sir. Come along!"

Turpin and Tom followed the ostler round a corner of the building, and then at the further end of a large yard they saw the stables, which appeared, for the size of the inn itself, to be unusually large and commodious.

It was always a practice with our two friends to ascertain precisely where their horses could be found, in case anything should occur to make such a knowledge all-important to them.

They were also very careful to learn exactly in what manner the stable door was fastened.

"Put them here, just opposite the door," said King, as they entered. "Don't take the bridles off, but give them a small quantity of corn."

The ostler, who was sagacious enough to know that he would earn most by doing their bidding, obeyed.

"And now," said Turpin, taking some money out of his pocket, and giving it to the ostler, "go up to the bar and fetch half-a-pint of rum."

"Half-a-pint of rum?"

"Yes. What is there extraordinary in that?"

"Oh! nothing—nothing," said the ostler, leaving the stable.

He returned in about five minutes with the measure of spirits in his hand.

Turpin took it from him, as he said—

"And now I want a pail about half full of clean water; take particular care that it is clean."

The ostler obeyed these orders with considerable curiosity as to what Turpin was going to do.

His surprise was very great when he saw Turpin empty half the quantity of the rum into the bucket, and give it to Bess, who drank it eagerly.

"There's a wrinkle for you," said Dick, to the ostler, observing his look of astonishment. "That mare's like a Christian, and now she has drank that will travel fifty — nay, I would not be afraid to say a hundred miles without pausing for breath or refreshment."

"Gammon!" said the ostler.

"It is a fact, and I would back her to do it for a hundred pounds!"

"Be cautious, Dick," whispered Tom, "or you will raise the man's suspicions."

"True," retorted Dick, in the same tone, "I forgot myself, but I am always carried away when I begin to praise her."

"There's only one horse that could do such a thing," said the ostler, "and that is Turpin's famous mare, Black Bess!"

"Pho! pho! my man; I would back my mare against the highwayman's any day!"

"Ah! it's very strange, but yours seems quite black!"

"It is, but there is nothing extraordinary in that, I imagine. But come, never mind, get another bucket of water for my friend's horse, and make haste, for I am badly in want of my breakfast, and the business, too, which I am upon is very urgent, and will admit of no delay."

The water was brought, the remainder of the rum emptied into it, and then given to King's horse, who seemed to like it quite as well as Black Bess.

"Be good enough, now," said Turpin, as he set down the pail, "to show us the way to the house."

"This way, if you please. You can see the door just opposite."

"Come along with us, and you shall have something to drink at the bar."

"Thanks, sir—much obliged," replied the ostler, leaving the way.

Turpin whispered to his friend.

"He has not locked the door," he said, "but merely pulled it to, so if there is occasion we can easily get at the stable."

"I almost fear he suspects who we are. It is rather foolish of you to say what you did."

"Very foolish, indeed. I am now fully sensible of my folly. However, it cannot be helped, so we must make the best we can of a bad bargain."

"There's nothing else left for us to do. Bu-, hah! here we are."

They entered the inn as they spoke.

It was a curious building, only one storey high, and seemed to have been converted into, and not built for, its present purpose. The door, through which they passed, opened into a kitchen of very great extent, in which were two or three people only, and they apparently belonging to the house.

The landlord, who was a very gentlemanly-looking man, came forward as soon as he perceived his guests, and bade them welcome.

"We shall not stay long!" said Tom King, "because our business is important and will admit of no delay."

"Still," said the landlord, with a smile, "you cannot travel without taking something substantial now and then in the shape of refreshment."

"That's true enough," said Turpin. "So bring us something that will suit us for breakfast. What have you got cooked in the house, for I can't stay while you prepare anything?"

"I have a nice round of beef, cold, that was boiled yesterday, if that will suit?"

"The very thing. Bring it at once, with a good hagon of your October ale to wash it down."

"Very good, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"A-hem! Dick!"

"What is it, Tom?"

"Didn't you tell me you knew the landlord here?"

"Well, only as seeing him occasionally. It is some time since I was here last, and he appears to have forgotten me."

"What do you think of him? I mean, what is your opinion of his character?"

"Oh! I hardly know. I have not noticed much, except that he seems a superior man to what people of his class generally are."

"Ah! yes. Have you looked no further?"

"No. What in the world are you driving at? Why don't you speak out? Do you see anything to cause suspicion?"

"Well, yes."

"What is it, my friend? Tell me at once. Do not keep me longer in suspense!"

"Hush! I can a little closer to me, and do not speak so loud. I am a bit of a physiognomist, and I invariably make a study of the countenance of every one I come in contact with. Now, I have studied the landlord's countenance here, and though at the first glance it seems open and candid enough, yet a little closer observation showed me that he was not all he professed to be."

"Very likely," said Dick. "Few are!"

"You misunderstand me. That man, Dick, mark my words, is a rascal, and we have everything to fear from him in case he should suspect who we are! Beneath the superficial aspect of his countenance is written plainly treachery and deceit! Do you notice what a long while it has taken him to execute our order?"

"You are strangely suspicious, Tom."

"It is because I see a danger in the man in which it is most to be feared—treachery!"

"We can but be on our guard, then, and prepared for anything that may happen. He is certainly a long time gone, but still that may, perhaps, arise from some very natural causes. I will look closer at him when he returns."

"You can do that now," said Tom, "for here he comes."

As he spoke, Mr. Waghorn entered, carrying a tray, on which was placed a large piece of cold beef and a tankard of ale.

"I am afraid," he said, as he put the comestibles on the table—"I am afraid, gentlemen, you will consider I have been a long time gone; but as I can see you are gentlemen, and expressed a wish to have some of my old October, I took the trouble to go down in the cellar and tap a fresh barrel on purpose for you."

"We are obliged by your attention," said Turpin, fixing his keen eyes upon the landlord's face. "Here's a health to all!"

Turpin drank some of the ale.

"Upon my word, that's good," he said. "Capital! And yes," he added, wetting his lips with his tongue, "it has left a strange taste behind it."

King started.

"A strange taste!" repeated the landlord, "impossible. You must have had something in your mouth. Why, that is the very best ale in my cellar. You taste it, sir."

These last words were addressed by Mr. Waghorn to Tom King, who raised the drink in his hands, and swallowed a small quantity.

"What do you think of it, sir?"

"It certainly has a peculiar smack with it which I cannot say I like. You had better bring us some more."

Mr. Waghorn, with a look of deep vexation on his face, which might arise from two causes, left the room.

"Dick, my friend," said Tom, as soon as the landlord was out of earshot, "I was right. He is a rascal, and we have fallen into the lion's den. That ale was drugged. I recognised the peculiar flavour instantly."

"Drugged!" said Turpin, springing to his feet.

"Sit down, Dick, we will see it all right. I have not the smallest doubt left on my mind but that I suspect who we are. Either he has come to the conclusion himself, or the ostler has communicated it to him. If the latter, you have only yourself to blame, and perhaps it will be a lesson not to talk so incautiously as you did to the ostler in the stable about your mare Black Bess. The landlord here, knowing we should be likely to make a desperate resistance, conceived the plan of drugging the ale, which would render us helpless. In the meantime, he has sent off for some assistance."

This was spoken in a suppressed, emphatic whisper.

"If this is so," said Turpin, "he shall rue the day."

I—

"Sit down, my friend, and be silent. Let us assure ourselves that we are right before we proceed to action. Don't look so excited, for, hark! here comes Mr. Waghorn."

Dick assumed as great an appearance of calmness as he could, and then said—

"But this second lot of ale, Tom?"

"I shall drink it without scruple. He knows now we are on the watch, and should notice any little peculiarity in the flavour. You may rely upon it there will be no danger in drinking this. I will taste it first."

"Do so! do so!"

Mr. Waghorn reached the table at which our friends were sitting, and placing down another tankard of ale, said—

"There, gentlemen, I have tried that myself, and I think you will find it all right. I cannot for the life of me conceive what was the matter with the other. I assure you it was drawn from the very choicest cask in my cellar."

"Oh! this is better," said Tom, as he handed the ale to his friend. "Try it."

Turpin had a wholesome dread of the effect of drugs, so having had so narrow an escape, he this time scarcely swallowed a mouthful.

"Yes; that's an improvement on the other. I can't get the taste of it out of my mouth. Come, Tom, make haste with what you are eating. It is quite time we were off."

"You are making a short stay at us, 'Samson and Lion.' Are you going far, gentlemen?"

"Yes, landlord, we are on rather a long journey, and have no time to spare. For myself, I have done, and am ready now, as soon as my friend has finished."

"Pray make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. I was

in hopes we should have had you here as guests a little longer."

Mr. Waghorn rose left the room and closed the door after him. Then the two highwaymen noticed something that had before escaped their observation, namely, that those persons who were in the apartment when they entered had now one and all left it. It was in itself a simple enough circumstance, but after what had occurred, Turpin was disposed to eye it with suspicion.

"I have started you off," said King, "and you are just as suspicious now as you were blindly confiding a little while ago. I suppose you would say, 'Let us go at once!'"

"Certainly!"

"Then I don't. You may depend we can't much increase the danger by remaining a little longer, so make a good meal in peace, as I intend to do. We have, perhaps, been alarming ourselves with a shadow."

"Not so, my friend—not so; I feel quite convinced of that. I can feel something at my heart which tells me I am in greater peril than ever I have been in before."

"Fancy, Dick, fancy! though generally speaking I am not disposed to fancy those inward monitors. I believe that our more subtle nature is able to apprehend danger before the grosser part, but with you it arises from having drank some liquid which you believe to have been drugged."

Turpin rose to his feet, and walked impatiently about the room.

"You take it very coolly, Tom," said Dick. "Take my advice, and let us leave this place at once. It is impossible to tell what extra peril we incur each moment we remain! Look, Tom, there is that early-looking ostler, with a most villanous expression on his face, just prowling across the yard. Tom, I tell you, I will stay here no longer!"

Turpin was in a greater state of alarm and agitation than ever his companion had seen him in.

"Why, Dick, positively I don't know you. You who, in the hour of danger, are generally so calm and self-possessed, to show so much—terror shall I call it—as this? Really, I cannot understand it!"

Dick was annoyed.

"I do not feel inclined to risk my liberty by staying here any longer. The danger, Tom, is, I am confident, much greater than you imagine, so let me persuade you to leave at once!"

"I will, Dick," replied Tom King, "leave at once. It is not worth while for us to disagree about such a trifle. Come on, I am ready!"

"I am glad of that," said Turpin; "and now let us get to our cattle as quickly as possible. But it strikes me most forcibly we shall be prevented in some way!"

"You magnify the danger. I can't make you out. You seemed quite unnerved. Surely, the small quantity of drugged ale that you drank has not had that effect upon you!"

"I cannot tell, Tom, I am sure; but I do feel very strangely. Ha! We are caught! Done for!"

"What do you mean? What is it?"

"Turn round, Tom," was the reply, "and look!"

King had his back to the window, and in obedience to his companion's words, he turned round and looked through it.

"Good heavens, Dick!" he said, "there is danger indeed. The yard is full of officers!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. WAGHORN COMES OUT IN RATHER STRONG COLOURS, AND SO DOES JACK THE OSTLER.

THIS was a sight which would not fail to fill the breasts of the two highwaymen with consternation, but before we relate what they did upon making such a discovery, it is necessary we should inform the reader how it was the officers in such force came to be in the yard of the "Samson and Lion."

The incautious words which Turpin had uttered in praise of his mare Black Bess raised a suspicion in the mind of the ostler which every moment increased.

It will be remembered that Dick tried as well as he could to allay the man's suspicions, and had taken him with him to the bar, where he had told the landlord to

give him what he liked to have to drink, and then leaving them made his way with his companion into the kitchen.

The ostler chose three-pennyworth of gin neat, and when Mr. Waghorn came back to the bar to execute the orders given to him by his guests, the ostler said—

"Mr. Waghorn! Mr. Waghorn!"

"Yes, you villain."

"No hard words, now. Did you look at the cooves in the kitchen?"

"Confound your impudence, what's that to you? Be off!"

"Mr. W., don't be a fool. This will be a good day for us."

"Oh! bother."

"It will. Those men represent a sum of somewhere about fifteen hundred pounds!"

"Fif—fifteen!"

"Hundred pounds!" iterated the ostler.

The landlord stared aghast.

"What do you mean?" he said; "speak out, you fool, do."

"Oh! go and be hanged," said the ostler, who did not seem to be over particular as to how he addressed his master.

Mr. Waghorn shook his fist.

"Listen!" said the ostler, catching him by the arm, and dragging him towards him, and whispering in his ear—

"Dick Turpin!"

"The devil?"

"Tom King!"

"Why don't you say what you have to say at once," said Mr. Waghorn. "Do you mean to tell me that our guests are those two notorious highwaymen—Dick Turpin and Tom King?"

"I do, governor. There's not no sort of mistake about it."

"And what do you say the reward is?"

"Fifteen hundred pounds!"

"What a sum, Jack!"

"It is, that's certain. Why, it's more nor we could make if we worked hard for a year."

"Silence! Have I not told you a thousand times never to allude to what we do?"

"All right, gov'n'r. No harm done. I didn't say nothin', only a guilty conscience needs no accuser. I s'pose you intend to nab these highflyers?"

"Oh! yes, I should like; but how are we to do it? They are desperate fellows, and won't give in without a hard struggle, you may depend."

"Lor, gov'n'r, do you mean to say you don't know how to make them 'ere as harmless as two blessed babbies?"

"No!"

"What have they ordered?"

"Some cold beef and ale. I must make haste, or my long absence will perhaps rouse their suspicion."

"Cut along, then, and just put some of this in the ale!"

The ostler, as he spoke, handed the landlord a small packet containing a white powder.

"What is this, Jack?"

"Oh! a soother, that's all. Just put it in the ale and stir it up, and if they drink it they will be all right in half-an-hour."

"But suppose they should not drink it; what then, Jack, eh?"

"Don't you think they will?"

"Oh! I don't know, they are very suspicious fellows, and they might fancy they tasted something."

"So they might."

Jack, the ostler, scratched his head.

"That's no obstacle," he said, after a pause. "I'll tell you how to manage it. Get them to drink the ale if you can, and I will mount a horse and ride to Guildford and fetch some officers. I can be back in half-an-hour."

"But the reward, Jack?"

"That'll be right. Can't you see that is the only way to make sure of it?"

"Not at all. The officers will want to share it, and then it won't be worth our while."

"You don't see the thing right yet. Get them to drink the ale if you can. Should they do so, they will in ten minutes afterwards be dead drunk, and incapable of

moving in the least. When this happens, all you will have to do will be to get some ropes and bind them secretly. Do you understand?"

The landlord nodded.

"When the officers come, then, supposing the highwaymen to drink the ale, they will not have to capture them, for they will be already captured, and, therefore, will not be able to claim any part of the reward."

"You're a sharper chap, Jack, than I gave you credit for being."

"Oh! I know a thing or two. And now, look at the case in another light. Suppose as they don't drink the ale and get suspicious like. What must you do?"

"I look to you, Jack, to know."

"Why, you must smooth things off as well as possible, and when you go out lock the door after you. Before they can escape, I shall be back with the officers, and then they can nab them, we going shares in the reward. So, you see, guv'nor, we makes sure of a summat, let things turn out as they will."

"Unless, after all, they should make their escape. I tell you, Jack, they are daring fellows."

"May be—may be. But they won't be daring enough to get off this time. I wager. Now, guv'nor, take in the grub, and I'll be off for the officers. I shall be back in half-an-hour."

"Very good, Jack."

We have seen how the landlord took in the drugged ale, and how, in consequence of their putting too large a dose in it, the highwaymen had found it out, and were upon their guard, ready to defend their liberties with their lives, and how they looked through the window and saw the yard full of officers.

The ostler's plan was a very good one, and he certainly deserves credit for his ingenuity in devising it; but we have yet to explain how it was he got back with the officers so much before the time he had mentioned.

The fact was that, as he was on his road to Guildford, he saw a largeish body of men approaching him, and when he got nearer he found they were police-officers conveying a prisoner from Guildford to London.

A few words sufficed to make them aware of the posture of affairs, and they pushed forward as rapidly as they could.

They reached the "Samson and Lion" in less than ten minutes, and eight of them alighted from their horses, leaving the remainder to keep guard over the prisoner.

By the ostler's directions they came round to the back and into the inn-yard, and they were advancing in a body to the door when Turpin called Tom's attention to them.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TURPIN AND KING MEET WITH NOTHING BUT DANGER ON EVERY SIDE, AND BEGIN TO LOSE ALL HOPE. The position of our two friends was certainly very critical, and really we do not see how they possibly can make their escape this time from the toils that have been spread around them by the cunning ostler and the landlord of the "Samson and Lion," of whom Turpin had had such a good opinion.

But he was destined before long to make one or two very startling and unexpected discoveries in connexion with Mr. Waghorn and his mode of life.

We must not anticipate.

On perceiving the officers in such numbers, the two highwaymen stood for a moment irresolute. They knew not how to act.

Tom King made a dash at the door.

"Fast!" he said, as he found he was unable to move it in the least.

We must beg our readers to remember that in the good old times, as some eccentric people call them, things were made in a very much more substantial manner than they are at present. Now-a-days a thing is not thought good unless it is light and fragile, but our forefathers thought nothing was good unless it was cumbersome and heavy.

So with this door at the "Samson and Lion." Had it been such a one as we see in our modern dwellings, it would scarcely have opposed Tom in the least; but, as it was, he was unable to shake it even, for it was made of stout oak, and weighty and strong enough to have served for the door of a prison.

"What is to be done, Dick?" asked King. "I am sorry I disregarded your foreboding as I did. It was foolish of me, and if you get into any trouble on my account through my obstinacy, I shall never forgive myself. Silence!"

A subdued murmuring sound came from the other side of the kitchen door.

It was the officers in consultation as to what they should do.

The two highwaymen listened intently, but all they could hear was now and then a word spoken in a louder tone than the others, but, of course, from this they could glean no sort of information.

"What course shall we pursue, Dick?" asked King.

"What plan will be the best to adopt?"

"That is very hard to determine," replied Turpin, as he glanced round the room.

"It is. You are right enough there, and I look to you to devise some mode of operations."

"You must assist."

"We must be quick, too, or we shan't have a chance," said Tom, as he heard three heavy knocks given on the panel of the kitchen door.

"What is to be done? I am quite at a loss to think. We may as well, though, come away from the door, for it is quite evident we cannot make our escape that way."

"Not exactly; though, if nothing better turns up, I—What's that?"

A key rattled in the lock.

"I forgot, Dick," said King. "Of course the door is locked on the outside, and they can come in when they think proper."

"No, they cannot," replied Turpin.

As he spoke, he sprang suddenly to the door, and, before the person who held the key could turn it in the lock, he slipped a couple of strong iron bolts into their sockets.

"They'll have to undo them before they get in," he said, after executing this feat.

The man, whoever it was, turned the key in the lock and shot back the bolt.

Then he paused.

He evidently hesitated to lift the latch and enter, for he by repute well knew the dangerous characters he had to deal with.

At last he summoned courage, and lifted the latch, expecting, of course, that the door would swing open to his hand.

To his surprise it was fast.

"They have bolted it on the inside," shouted a voice, in loud enough tones to penetrate through the thick oak, for the two friends heard them distinctly.

Then there was a murmuring sound.

"Batter it down! batter it down! Take them alive or dead!"

"Alive, if you please," said another voice; "and then we get our blood money!"

The next moment a violent assault was made upon the door.

But while this was taking place, Turpin and King had not been idle. They had together made a very careful examination of the room, but the result of it was by no means to their advantage.

The thought of escape by the window of course occurred to them, but they found it was one that did not open, such being the fashion of making them at a time when the necessity of ventilation and fresh pure air was not so well understood as at present.

The window was, besides, protected with a number of iron bars, which effectually put an end to all hope of their making their exit that way.

The wily ostler had, doubtless, taken care to make the officers acquainted with that fact, or they would have endeavoured to make their way through it into the room.

The two highwaymen looked around them in despair. Nowhere could they see the slightest probability of making their escape.

"I am afraid it is all up with us, Tom," said Dick, "and that we shall be nabbed at last. The only thing that remains for us to do is to fight it out when the grubs enter. But what possible chance can we stand against so many?"

"None at all!"

"You should have taken my advice, I knew we were



[TURPIN AND KING ESCAPE FROM THE "SAMSON AND LION."]

in great danger, that's why I was so anxious and agitated."

"Don't say a word about that, Dick. I know it's all my fault, and that if anything happens to you I shall have to answer for it. How they are banging at the door! They will have it down in a few minutes."

The din was something terrific.

The officers had evidently been supplied with some heavy battering instrument, for the blows came upon the door with great force, and the thick panels were beginning to crack in many places.

Then it started a little from its hinges.

The officers gave loud shouts as they perceived this symptom of yielding, and increased their efforts.

"Well, Dick," said Tom, "it's no good our standing here like this. It appears to me that, since we can't get out, the best thing we can do is to delay as long as we can the officers making an entrance."

"To be sure, that will be it. Help me move this table.

There, now! push the end close up to the door, and then we must get something to wedge between it and the wall."

"That will be the ticket. We shall stop them for a little while, that's certain; and now let us resolve what we are to do."

The police must have had some idea that a barrier had been put before the door, for some one cried in a loud, authoritative voice—

"Resistance is worse than useless, so give in at once. We are bound to take you, for you cannot possibly escape. Yield, therefore, with a good grace, to superior numbers, and prevent the needless spilling of blood."

The officer waited a minute or two for a reply, but none was made.

"Surrender!" he cried again; "it will be the best policy. We will give you three minutes to open the door. If you do not do so at the expiration of that time, the consequences be on your own heads."

The three minutes elapsed, but no sound of any kind came from the kitchen.

"Curse you both, then!" yelled the officer, in a great rage. "I will not be played with any longer. Draw your pistols! Make ready! Present them to the door! Fire!"

There was a stunning report arising from the discharge of about six or seven pistols.

The bullets crashed through the door and lodged in the wall opposite.

The officers waited until the smoke had cleared away, and then as all was still silent as before, they began again to hammer at the door.

Neither Turpin nor King were in the way of the shots that came into the kitchen, for they had resorted to the only outlet there was to the room, and that was the door at the top of the cellar steps.

It was simply the instinct of wishing to get as far as possible away from their foes, and placing an additional barrier between them, that made Turpin and King take refuge behind this door.

To be sure, doing so did not better their condition in the least; but still, as Tom remarked, while securing the cellar door on the inner side, it could not possibly make it any worse.

A crashing sound, now mingled with the blows upon the kitchen door, which plainly enough told our friends that it was giving way before the vigorous assault that was made upon it.

They were surrounded by utter darkness.

Unfortunately the door at the top of the cellar steps, behind which were the two highwaymen, was rather a slight one, and there was certainly no hope that it would withstand for any length of time a resolute attack upon it.

"Come away from the door, Tom," said Dick to his friend. "You are in danger of receiving a chance shot."

"I am almost afraid to move in this strange place. I can hear your voice plain enough, and tell to a trifle whereabouts you are standing, but as for seeing you it is quite out of the question."

"Will it be safe, think you, to show a light?"

"Oh! yes; I should think so. But have you the means about you for procuring one?"

"Certainly. I am never without. Stop a moment; we will soon see what kind of a place we are in."

Turpin took from his pocket a small lantern, which, considering the state of the manufacturing arts at the period, was certainly a wonderful object. It carried a small wax taper, which Dick ignited by means of a phosphorus match, then, and for many years afterwards, called thieves' matches, because when they were first invented they were almost exclusively used by members of that fraternity, who found them exceedingly useful.

The flame from the taper which Dick lighted was only a tiny one, and by itself would scarcely have dispersed the gloom for a foot around it, but placed in the lantern, which was fitted with a reflector of highly polished silver, and a lens of peculiar construction, Dick was enabled by its means to cast a broad, bright beam of light in any direction he thought proper.

Holding it by the handle, the highwayman moved the lantern rapidly about, and flashed the light upon all the objects by which he was surrounded.

In this way, then, the two friends were enabled to form a tolerably correct idea of the kind of place they were in.

They found they were standing at the head of a flight of steep brick steps, leading down apparently into the cellars of the "Samson and Lion."

It must be remembered that though it has taken us some time to relate what occurred after the two highwaymen passed through this door, yet a few moments elapsed in reality until Dick lighted his lantern.

A terrific crash at this moment announced that the officers had succeeded in entirely demolishing the door.

Then arose a loud shout of triumph and gratification, which was quickly changed into one of surprise and disappointment at finding the room empty and their prey nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE SECRET OF MR. WAGHORN'S OCCUPATION.

"LEAD carefully, Tom," said Dick to his companion, not, however, raising his voice above a whisper. "The stairs are wet and slippery, and if you lose your footing you will bring the officers upon us at once. Follow me; we may perhaps succeed in placing another door between ourselves and our foes!"

Dick commenced the descent of the steps.

"Hold!" said King, in a whisper. "Listen!"

Some kind of altercation seemed to be going on in the kitchen, and both listened intently, for they might hear something that would be of service to them.

Suddenly they heard a rapid rush of footsteps across the kitchen, and something plump against the door.

"I tell you, you shan't! Not one of you! You should have broken down the door sooner before they escaped! You must not—shall not pass through this door unless it is over my dead body!"

The friends recognised the voice.

It was Mr. Waghorn, the landlord's.

They looked at each other, as well as they could, in that dim place, with astonishment depicted upon their features.

Before, however, they could communicate with each other by words, they heard a harsh voice reply to Mr. Waghorn, and all their faculties were bent to hear what this voice said.

"Stand away from the door, Mr. Waghorn! Your conduct is singularly suspicious, and almost sufficient to warrant my taking you into custody; besides which, you are interrupting officers in the discharge of their duty. Let us pass at once, for every minute that we delay only gives them a better chance of ultimate escape! If you do not stand aside at once, my men shall force you away, and you will besides have to account for your extraordinary behaviour!"

"What can be the meaning of this?" asked King, still speaking below his breath. "I am fairly puzzled! What do you think, Dick?"

"Simply this. There is something here which Mr. Waghorn does not wish found out."

"It must be that. I wonder what it can be?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell. However, one thing I think is certain; and that is, that it will turn out to our advantage if we immediately act upon what we have heard."

"I think it very likely. Lead on, my friend! How fast they are talking, to be sure! How is this adventure to terminate?"

Very carefully the highwaymen descended the greasy steps, holding by the dank walls as they went.

They reached in a moment or two the bottom of the steps, and found themselves in a vault or cellar of considerable extent.

There was no light in this place, with the exception of that which proceeded from Turpin's lantern; this, however, was amply sufficient to light up, one after another, every nook and corner in the vault.

From the landlord's manner, both Turpin and King had expected to find something of a very extraordinary nature in this place, and no words can possibly express how much surprised they felt when they found it was absolutely empty.

Scarcely crediting that their eyes had not deceived them, they made again a rapid examination of the cellar.

But no; nothing was there. Not so much even as a barrel or a jar.

"Well, this beats all," said Dick. "Why, the landlord must be a perfect maniac. What earthly reason could he have had for wishing to prevent the officers coming here? This is a mystery, indeed!"

"You are right there, mystery is the word! Recollect we have only made a most cursory examination of the place. Send me the light, and I will examine it more closely. I only hope Mr. Waghorn will keep the officers long enough at bay to enable me to have a good look about me. They seem to be going it now!"

The subdued murmuring sound of many voices reached their ears in one indeterminate hum.

Tom King took the little lantern from Turpin's hand, and, casting its light downwards, made a careful exploration of the floor.

There was nothing to recompense him for his trouble.

the flooring was uniformly composed of very much abraded bricks, but there was nothing in any part of it that indicated a secret outlet, which was what King was looking for, and what he fully expected to find.

He rose from his stooping posture with a feeling of annoyance.

"I can find nothing, Dick. Surely it must be a secret entrance into some other place that Mr. Waghorn is afraid the officers will discover."

"Very likely that is it," said Turpin, turning away from the foot of the stairs where he had been standing while King made his search; "very likely. Look round the walls, and see if you can find anything."

"That is our last hope," said Tom, as he bit by bit examined the walls of the vault with the lantern.

"Mr. Waghorn is still speaking," said Dick. "I feel curious beyond measure to know what he can possibly have said to delay the officers so long as he has. I"—

A sudden exclamation from his comrade's lips arrested the remainder of his speech.

"This way, Dick," cried Tom; "I have discovered it at last."

Turpin hastened towards his friend, and found him standing in a little recess, almost cupboard-like in shape, from the right-hand side of which opened a small door.

Dick's astonishment was very great.

"How could we possibly have missed seeing this door? Why I, when we first examined the place, cast the light of the lantern into it."

"I know you did; but are you not aware the light fell only upon the wall opposite to you, leaving the sides of the recess in deep shadow? Now, as you see, it is from the side of the recess that the small door opens."

"I see."
"There does not appear to be the least attempt at concealment, and that, very likely, is one reason why we did not see it."

Dick laughed.

"We must not stay now to go into that subject," he said. "Quick, pass through the door, for, hark! the sounds of contention up above grow louder every moment."

"Come on, then," said Tom, as he passed through the mysterious portal; "I am ready."

Dick pressed through close behind him, and secured the door as well as he could.

Just as he did so, he heard the officers descend the steps with a rush.

He turned to his friend, who was a foot or two in advance of him, for the door they had so providentially found was at the commencement of an arched passage.

"The officers are in the cellar," he said, in a low voice, for he did not know how plainly sounds from the place he was in could be heard in the outer cellar. "Mr. Waghorn has not succeeded in his attempt to prevent them doing so, as I most devoutly wish he had."

King made no reply to this speech, but, looking carefully around on all sides of him, made his way as quickly as he could along the passage.

It was quite impossible to see its extremity, so they were forced to the conclusion that it was of considerable length.

There was nothing remarkable in its appearance. The walls and roof were composed of old red bricks, but the floor of nothing but hard earth.

At last, after proceeding about twenty yards, they came to another door, which was the termination of the passage.

Rough bands of iron crossed this door in many directions, and were fastened at short distances by large nails, the heads of which projected at least three-quarters of an inch from the woodwork.

The two friends both looked at this door, and mentally calculated its strength. They raised their eyes at the same moment.

"This is a barrier!" said King. "It strikes me we have done for ourselves at last, for here we are like rats in a trap—and hark! the officers have discovered the door through which we have just passed."

Some heavy blows, and the shaking of the door in its frame, reverberated with unpleasant plainness along the passage.

"We mustn't give up, Tom, for all that. It's a ticklish

situation to be in, to be sure, but we must make the best of it."

Bang! bang! bang! bang! came the blows on the door.

"We must get through, and that quickly," added King, "if we wish to preserve ourselves skin-whole. If they were to take it into their heads to fire through that door, as they did through the other, we should stand but a poor chance of escaping the bullets."

"We should, indeed," said Turpin, feeling in a moment the full danger of their situation. "This door must be forced."

"But how are we to do it? It's all very well to say the door must be forced, but such a job as that would require both tools and time, neither of which we have just at present."

"That's true enough. Have you tried the door, though? If you recollect, the one at the top was not fastened, and perhaps this is not."

"Perhaps not," said King, seizing upon the supposition with a feeling of hope springing up in his breast. "It's no go," he added, almost immediately; "the door is as firm as a rock."

A silence of a minute or two followed this announcement, and then both the highwaymen felt how very tightly they had laid hold of this faint hope.

A look of desperation quickly succeeded upon their faces the one of disappointment they had worn, and both began to examine their weapons.

The altercation between the landlord and the officers seemed to be by no means over. The blows had ceased, and therefore the voices could be heard plainly enough, though not the words that were uttered.

This cessation of attack on the part of the officers the friends felt boded no good to them; and in that strange place, into which they had so imprudently ventured, they waited with great anxiety to know what would happen next.

The peculiar accents of Mr. Waghorn's voice rose above all the others.

Dick had placed the lantern on the floor, and with its lens turned towards the door they were so anxious to penetrate, so that the greater part of it was lighted up with great distinctness.

As, however, Turpin raised his eyes from the priming of his pistols, and looked towards this iron-bound door, he uttered a slight exclamation.

Tom King was standing with his back to him, and he turned round instantly.

"What is it?" he said.

Dick placed his hand upon the door.

"We are a couple of fools," he replied. "We have been troubling ourselves all this while to break open this door, and the key in the lock all the time."

"Impossible."

"One would think so. But look, here it is; my eye lighted upon it by the greatest wonder in the world."

"Your sight must be very keen, my friend. Of course, now I can see it; but it is a very small key for so large and so heavy a door."

"It is. I am quite surprised. And yet key it must be; still I can see no signs of a lock."

"Nor I. Turn it, my friend, quickly, and try. The officers have renewed their attack upon the door."

"And as if they meant to break it down, too. Whatever can they be striking it with?"

"Axes, I should say, by the peculiar sound. If it is so, they will soon have it down. Does the door yield?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

It was in quite a faint way that King said "Hurrah!" but he gave a sigh of relief as he did so. Then, catching up the lantern, he followed his friend, and closed the door quickly after him.

Dick had taken the key out of the lock, and so was seen inserted in the keyhole, and the door locked on the other side.

Both then became sensible that they were in a much warmer atmosphere than they had been previously.

There was, too, a strange, sickly smell pervading it.

But although they felt this, neither alluded to it by speech at present, but turned their attention to making the door as capable of resisting an attack as their means would permit.

They were in hopes of finding some bolts on the inner side, but they saw none. Apparently the only fastening the door ordinarily had was the lock.

"I remember once, Tom, being in a place underneath a woodman's hut, and I thought that about the strangest subterranean place there well could be, but this beats it all together!"

"It is a strange place," said King, as he glanced around him; "but before we examine it at all let us try if we cannot find some means of barricading the door."

"There ought to be two bars somewhere; for look, Tom, here are the staples on each post."

"And here is one of the bars," said King, raising a large piece of iron from the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DICK AND TOM RATHER PREMATURELY CONGRATULATE THEMSELVES UPON HAVING MADE THEIR ESCAPE.

It was with a sensation of much greater security and satisfaction than he had hitherto felt, that Turpin took the iron bar from the hands of his friend, and placed it in the staples.

It crossed the door in a slanting direction.

"Now, if we can only find the other," he said, "and get that fixed in, the officers will be some little time forcing an entrance, I fancy."

"So should I. The other bar, I should think, is sure not to be far from where we found that one."

"I should think not. Just show a light. Ah! here it is!"

Turpin picked up the other bar, and having fixed it, turned his attention to the place they had entered.

The blows on the door at the other end of the passage could still be heard, though but faintly, in consequence of the second one fitting so closely in its frame.

For a moment or two, as Tom King turned the light of the lamp in different directions, the two highwaymen looked around them in silence.

They were at one side of an almost circular-shaped vault, which they roughly estimated could not be more than eight feet high, nor more than thirty in diameter.

"Whatever place is this?" asked Turpin. "Dear me! who would have thought, to have looked at Mr. Waghorn, that he was such a mysterious character!"

"Not many, perhaps; and yet, as you know, I noticed something peculiar about him the moment we met for the first time."

"You did. But do you feel how tremendously hot this place is? It is quite like an oven!"

"It is, and what kind of business the landlord carries on down here I am quite at a loss to conceive!"

"But we shall quickly find out," said Turpin, stepping forward. "I only hope we shall be fortunate enough to find some other mode of egress from the place than the door by which we have just entered."

"And so do I, for I shall be glad enough to exchange this close, stifling atmosphere for the fresh air and daylight above. What part of the inn are we under now, I wonder?"

"I can't imagine. Yet stop! Yes, I can! We were at the back of the house, weren't we?"

"Yes."

"Then we went down the cellar steps, and the passage we found runs at right angles to them."

"That is right."

"We must, then, I take it, be somewhere under the yard."

"I think so, now I come to call to mind the bearings of the different places."

"Then," said Dick, looking up at the black roof, "we may console ourselves with the idea that the blue sky is over our heads!"

In a more earnest manner they commenced looking for some means of leaving this circular vault, but they could not help pausing with deep curiosity to examine several things in the centre of this place, which at a moment explained Mr. Waghorn's motive for not wishing the police to descend into the cellar.

In the first place they found a strangely-constructed furnace, in which a few embers still smouldered.

It was from this source that the sickly and oppressive heat proceeded.

Close by was a number of odd-looking instruments, and

Turpin took one in his hand in order to look at it more closely.

King pressed forward with the light, and as soon as he perceived the object his friend had taken up, he exclaimed—

"I see it all now. Everything becomes comprehensible in a moment! Do you know what you are holding in your hand?"

"Yes, a mould, though I have never seen one just this shape before."

"I have. A chap showed me one just like it once. He said that it would make better counterfeit money than could be made by other means."

"I should think it very likely," said Turpin, who had been turning the mould over and over in his hands, and carefully examining it. "This one appears to be for half-a-crown."

"And here is one of the casts from it," said Tom, taking up a bright-looking coin, from a heap of others that were partially covered with sand.

"It is really very good, and though this one is, I suppose, scarcely finished, yet it has a very genuine appearance. And so it turns out mine host of the 'Samson and Lion' is a coiner on a very extensive scale."

"And you may depend he has made the subject his study. Now, one would scarcely have thought he would have ventured to have called in the officers, as he appears to have done."

"The thought that his secret would be discovered did not, perhaps, occur to him. I dare say from the look of the place he has been carrying on this trade for a good many years, and so, having escaped so long unsuspected, has become reckless."

"That is just it. Now, I'll tell you what I think we are really compelled to do."

"What is that?"

"Why, find some means of getting out of here as quickly as possible, and when we find we can leave instantly, we will unbar and unlock the door we have carefully fastened, and let the officers come in without their having to force an entrance. I think that is the best way we can be revenged on Mr. Waghorn."

"And I! It shall be done, too, if possible. I expect, though, to hear the officers make an attack on this door every second."

"Come on, then, at once. I feel certain somehow that there is another means of exit."

"Well, I only hope there is. Do you carry the lantern, my friend, and I will go a little in advance of you."

Tom King took up the lantern, and Turpin crossed over to the other side of the vault.

But though they subjected all sides of it to the most rigid scrutiny, no signs of an opening could be seen.

They were soon convinced there was no door except the one by which they had entered, and they once more advanced to the furnace.

"It strikes me very forcibly," said Dick, "that we shall be found along with Mr. Waghorn's coining apparatus. Ha! did you hear that?"

"Well, rather, I should think. That officer must have some muscle to give a door a whack like that."

"No, no, Tom. I did not mean the blow on the door, though the sound followed close upon my exclamation. I think we're saved, my friend, for I heard as plainly as ever I heard it in my life, the peculiar neigh Bess often gives when she is anxious to be off."

"You did?"

"Yes. The sound came from just over my head. We thought we were under the yard, but it seems, instead, we are under the stable."

"If such should really prove to be the case, I shall have strong hopes indeed of our making our escape. You are sure your ears did not deceive you?"

"Quite sure."

"Then if the stable is just over our heads we will quickly make our way into it. The roof, fortunately, is not a high one. What can we get to stand upon?"

"This mound of turf, I should think, we move it where it will be of service."

"That will do capital. Make haste, for if our friends have any idea we are making our escape they will fire at once, and it is not worth while to risk being put out of the world, or even injured, by a shot of that sort."

"It is not."

Both now set about removing to the centre of the vault the turf, of which there was a tolerable quantity close to the furnace, where it had doubtless been placed to serve as fuel.

They piled it up as high as they could, and when they carried the last, had the satisfaction of finding that it was just high enough for the purpose.

Dick mounted upon it instantly, and, taking the lantern again into his own hands, made an examination of the ceiling. He knew not as yet how much difficulty there might be in making a way through it.

But, to his unbounded joy, his eyes fell upon a small trap-door.

"We're saved, Tom! we're saved!" he cried, yet not loudly. "Were saved! There is a trap-door in the ceiling here, which opens into the stables. Hurrah! old fellow, we shall do Mr. Waghorn yet. When once we get to our cattle and mount, I will give them leave to catch us."

The discovery of this trap-door was so unexpected that Tom could hardly believe it was real. He feared the news was too good to be true.

He mounted therefore in a moment upon the mound of turf, and, as Dick turned the bright ray of light from the lantern upward, there he saw the trap-door plain enough.

It was small in size, yet large enough for a slim man to pass through easily. It did not appear, though, to have been used for many a day, for the two bolts that fastened it were completely rusted in their sockets.

The woodwork of it, too, was covered with that fine, disagreeable-looking moss which grows so plentifully in dark, damp places.

Dick made several efforts to draw back these bolts, but it was some time before he succeeded.

The second bolt was even more obstinate than the first, but it went back at last with a kind of shrieking creak.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN REGAIN THEIR STEEDS, MOUNT, AND MAKE ANOTHER ESCAPE.

WHILE our friends were thus occupied, the blows were still rained upon the door.

There was a little circumstance connected with them which they entirely overlooked.

This was, that, though the door was struck, still so violent an attack as might have been expected was not made upon it.

Had our friends noticed this, they probably enough would have set it down to its real cause.

But they did not notice it. They were too busy with the trap-door.

Still, we feel that it is with the highwaymen, and not with the officers, that we have to do; so we will not, by any allusion, anticipate events.

When the second bolt was withdrawn, it became rather a serious question whether they should boldly open the door and emerge into the stable—supposing Dick was right in coming to the conclusion that it was the stable—or should they first endeavour to ascertain what was on the other side.

The latter was the most prudent course, so they resolved to adopt it.

Dick accordingly raised his arm to push open the trap-door a little way and then peep through.

It was as firm as a rock.

Upon making this discovery, he could not restrain a groan of disappointment.

"It's no good," he said. "We must remain. The door is either fastened on the other side, or else there is something so heavy upon it that it cannot be raised."

"Or," said Tom King, taking up the poker from the furnace, "it has been closed for so long that it has stuck in its frame as the bolts had. Stand aside! let us have a try!"

"Hold a moment!" said Turpin. "Make no needless noise. We may give the alarm to some one in the stable, if it should happen to be tenanted."

"You take the poker, then, and try if you cannot force the door open."

Dick did so, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the door give most unequivocal symptoms of yielding.

"There! I told you so!" said King, as it was loosened

all round, and Dick gave the tool back into his hands. "I thought the wood had only swelled and stuck."

"And you thought right! Silence though! I am going to lift the trap a little way."

Very carefully, then, Turpin raised the trap about a couple of inches.

His first supposition was confirmed at once. The door opened into the stable.

It did not take long for his nose to make him cognizant of that.

He listened, but he heard nothing save the restless movements of the horses in the stalls.

He spoke in a whisper to his companion.

"Come on," he said. "All's right! But pray be quiet!"

As he uttered these words he took hold of the frame of the door, and, by the muscles in his arms, drew himself slowly and carefully upwards.

All was still, and in another instant he was standing in the stable.

He caught hold of Tom's hands and assisted him up.

Then they closed the trap-door, and crept stealthily to the end of the stall they were in, and looked round to see if any one was in sight.

No, the coast, apparently, was quite clear; so they ventured to walk towards the door, which was just pushed to, but not latched.

Black Bess and Tom's steed were in the same boxes they had been placed, and all ready for immediate service.

But just as they mounted—which they lost no time in doing—they heard a loud shout in the yard.

At the same moment, too, there came up through the trap-door, which Dick had been unable to fasten, some of the officers who had been battering at the door.

To have hesitated would have been to be lost; so, uttering a hasty burrah, Turpin and King, stooping low down in their saddles, dashed at full speed into the inn-yard.

The officers, who had been standing in a dense throng near the threshold, were rather disconcerted at this sight, which was as sudden as it was unexpected, and they gave way on all sides.

As no violence had as yet been done to them, both highwaymen disdained to draw their hangers, as they might have done, but simply swung their riding-whips around them.

These were loaded at the handle with lead, and, in a vigorous grasp, were very dangerous weapons.

The officers did not take long to recover from their panic, and they rushed forward to seize the horses in a body, but they might as well have attempted to stay a whirlwind.

Without suffering the least injury whatever, Turpin and King were fortunate enough to reach the highroad.

They did not pause in the least, but dashed along in the direction they intended to travel, but the hasty glance they gave at the front of the inn showed them that both Mr. Waghorn and Jack the ostler were there as prisoners.

The reader will remember that a man had been left in charge of the horses and prisoner, and the officers, before the highwaymen could reach a bend in the road, had mounted them, and were in full pursuit.

"Forward! forward!" shouted Dick, as he turned back and saw his foes behind him. "We shall have some sport now, Tom. The chase gets interesting."

"Rein in a little, then," said King, who was already falling in the rear, for the words of her master, spoken, as they were, in exhilarating tones, caused Black Bess to almost double her speed. "Pull in!"

"You must urge your nag forward, Tom. The officers appear well mounted and their horses fresh."

"They do," said Tom, and he struck his spurs into the flanks of his horse.

The officers, who, in their anxiety to take Turpin alive, had acted so considerably towards him, now that they saw he was in a fair way of making his escape, fired volley after volley from their pistols.

But too great a distance had been placed between the fugitives and the police for these shots to have any effect beyond that of startling every living creature that made the lane and the adjoining meadows its home.

Still they fired as fast as they could load, and by means

of goading their cattle to the utmost, contrived to keep Turpin and King in view.

It was only by a long gallop that our friends could hope to escape, for the country was flat, and there was no cover visible for many a mile around.

They were careful, though, not to distress their horses, and so only put them to just sufficient speed to maintain a safe distance between them and the officers. They trusted by this means to tire out their pursuers, and when this was the case, by putting their steeds upon their mettle, to get quite clear of them.

The officers, however, pushed on in a most determined manner, so that, although Bess easily enough performed the feat, Tom's horse had occasionally a little difficulty in keeping pace.

At last, after a two hours' ride, the highwaymen felt it to be imperatively necessary to breathe their horses for a few moments.

They had just crossed a common of considerable extent, and they could see uninterruptedly behind them for a great distance.

But though they gazed long and anxiously in the direction they had come, and shaded their eyes with their hands, they could not see the smallest signs of the officers.

"We have escaped them for a time, Dick, I really think," said Tom King. "They have held out well, I consider."

"They have, indeed; but I am in hopes, now they have relinquished the chase, they must have felt the utter hopelessness of capturing us."

"Yes. We have, nevertheless, had a narrow escape, as narrow as ever either had, I fancy. Very fortunate, indeed, was it for us that Mr. Waghorn was a coiner, and carried on his business underground!"

"Yes, or I scarcely fancy we should have been here now. However, who knows?"

"It is some consolation to think the officers have made the rascally landlord and his ostler prisoners. They will have some difficulty in getting off at the assizes."

"Oh! none at all! The judge will very soon dispose of them. They may safely consider they have seen the 'Samson and Lion' for the last time."

"No doubt, no doubt!"

We must beg our readers to call to mind that at the time of which we are now writing, and, indeed, for long afterwards, many offences which are now visited with a comparatively slight penalty, were then capital ones, and persons who were convicted of making bad money were hanged without mercy. It was an offence which neither the first, second, nor third George forgave.

Therefore it was that Turpin spoke so positively about their fate.

Tom and Dick now gathered the reins once more in their hands, but before they started, they turned round, and again looked keenly and scrutinizingly in their rear.

The police-officers were not in sight.

"They have turned back, depend upon it," said Turpin, "and we can now pursue our journey in peace, and more at leisure. Your horse, Tom, seems quite blown."

"He does; and, although Bess shows no signs of distress, you must bear in mind we have come a long distance and at a great speed before we halted."

"So we did. However, it has carried us a long way on our journey, for I took care to shape my course as well as I could. I don't suppose we have gone far out."

"Oh! no; I have taken notice how the land lies." "Well, then, can you form any idea of whereabouts we are?"

"I should think about twenty miles from the New Forest."

"Then," said Dick, "we will try if we cannot perform the rest of our journey at a moderate rate. I shall want a good rest after this."

"Still, I think we have got out of Mr. Wiggles's way. It will now be a feeling of revenge against us that will actuate him, and he will spare nothing to have us captured."

"I fancy not."

"But if we stay here a time, and I dare say it will be even more profitable to us than in London, we shall give his anger time to cool."

"Oh! I don't care a fig for him nor his anger either. Push along."

CHAPTER XL.

THE TWO FRIENDS FOLLOW THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT THROUGH THE NEW FOREST, AND MAKE A PROFITABLE DISCOVERY.

WHEN Dick Turpin and Tom King, three hours afterwards, reached the borders of the New Forest, it was quite dark.

They were holding a rather animated conversation as to whether they should proceed still further.

"What's the good?" said Turpin. "We may as well have a rest somewhere as not. Remember, we have been a long time upon the road, and a merciful man is merciful to his beast."

"That's right enough; but I don't see where we are to put up, and I don't much relish the idea of spending the night in a tree."

"Nor I."

"Very well, then, let us proceed. As it is, I see no signs of human habitation, but we must do so if we keep on."

"I don't know that. We are in a very sparsely-populated district, and, instead of going in the direction of dwellings, we may only be plunging deeper and deeper in the wood."

"I admit there is the fear of doing that, yet I think if we take care to keep where the trees are thin, we shall soon find a place—a cottage, or something of that sort—where we can rest."

"Forward, then! I don't see what else is to be done."

They started their horses afresh, and though Black Bess presented no very palpable signs of flagging, she must have been suffering from fatigue.

In this way they went on, at scarcely more than a walking pace.

The darkness increased every moment.

In spite, too, of their efforts to keep amongst the trees at the margin of the forest, they found they were gradually getting farther and farther in.

At last, Turpin pulled up.

"It is folly going farther like this. We shall be benighted here, that's clear enough; so let us stop at once. We may find a less comfortable place."

"I should not give in yet," said King. "It's confoundingly dark, but it appears to me if we bear a little more to the left we shall get clearer of the trees."

"They don't grow so closely together there, I really think. Come on, we may as well make the attempt."

"Of course we may. And look, I am right, there is a light among the trees there."

"Where?"

"It has gone now. Stop; there it is again!"

"Oh! I see it. Is it a cottage, think you?"

"I hope so."

"It can't be that," said Dick, a moment or two afterwards; "the light is not stationary."

"Halt a moment and let us see; I fancied the light shifted, but we may have been deceived by our own motion."

"No, that cannot be, for look! it is almost out now, and—"

"Now it has gone altogether."

"No; there it is, a little farther along. Do you see it?"

"Yes, plainly enough. It is either the will-o'-the-wisp or else some one carrying a lantern."

"If it is the former, the less attention we pay to it the better, for you know well enough a will-o'-the-wisp will only flicker before us, and lead us into some morass."

"We shall soon know whether it is that, my friend, if we follow it a little while."

"So we shall. Come along, then."

"Be careful where you tread; the ground may be treacherous."

"I am not afraid. Bess is sure-footed, and I can safely trust myself to her. You can follow close to me."

The mysterious light still flicked before them, but in a tolerably direct line.

What in the world can it be, Dick?" asked Tom, after regarding it for some moments attentively. "I fancy if it is a man with a light; we ought to see some indications of his form."

"Well, I don't know. I should say seeing is quite out."

of the question. I never knew it so dark before as it now is."

"I can hear nothing," said Tom. "I think it something rather singular."

"Then we will soon find out what it is. Push your horse on a bit faster."

King did so, yet they could not perceive that they approached the light in the least.

And now every moment saw them still deeper involved amongst the trees; but the intense curiosity they felt to know the meaning of the strange light made them quite heedless of this circumstance.

That it was not what they first fancied it—namely, a will-o'-the-wisp—they were quite certain. Its course was too direct, and the flame too constant, for it to be that strange emanation from the earth.

In fact, they found now that it was only invisible for a moment, as though a person in carrying it had passed behind some opaque object.

But in a short time the trees grew so thickly together, and the underwood got so dense, that it became almost an impossibility to proceed, and so Dick and Tom drew up.

There was the provoking light, flitting before them in just the same fashion.

"I feel very tired," said Turpin, "but I am determined to prosecute this adventure to the end. I should never feel satisfied if I left without finding it out."

"Nor I," said Tom.

"Alight then, my friend; we can fasten the horses to the trunk of this tree, and creep forward on foot."

"That will be it."

"You must lose no time, though. Look how fast the light travels."

"It does, indeed. We must make them secure. We shall soon overtake the light, I make no doubt; but there is another thing to be taken into consideration."

"What is it?"

"Why, if we go wandering into the forest, how are we to find our way back to the horses? Recollect, it is pitch dark."

"You need not remind me of that. Confound it, I have just stepped into a hole full of mud."

"We must both be careful; but, seriously speaking, if we tether the horses here, how are we to find our way back to them?"

"Oh! I can get out of that difficulty with very little trouble. Take hold of this."

"Take hold of what?"

"This ball of fine twine. It is of considerable length. Tie one end of it to the tree and unwind the ball as you proceed, letting the string fall on the ground; you will easily enough find your way back then."

"So we shall, unless the string should not happen to be long enough."

"There is no fear of that. I have two more just such balls in my pocket."

"Oh! then, of course we shall be right. Now then, are you ready?"

"Quite."

"Come along, then, it is high time, for the light is almost out of sight."

"It is. I can see it though. Ha! it stops."

"Does it?"

"Yes, I am sure. Hurry on, we shall find all out now."

Taking care to pay out the string as they went, which, in the event of their return, would most certainly prove an excellent clue, the two highwaymen struggled through the furze and gorse bushes in the direction of the light, which now seemed to be quite stationary.

As they drew still nearer to it they advanced with more caution.

But just when they were within, as they fancied, a dozen yards or so of it, it danced away again.

Turpin and King stopped at once.

"This is a regular wild-geese chase," said Dick; "you may depend it is nothing more than some marsh light, and it will lead us about all night."

"It cannot be that," replied Tom. "Listen. I can plainly distinguish a crashing among the bushes, as though some one was passing through them!"

Turpin bent his ear towards the ground.

"Your hearing has not deceived you," he said. "The sound is very faint, but I can certainly distinguish just

such a noise as would be produced by some one forcing their way through thick vegetation."

"Then it can't be a will-o'-the-wisp, that's certain. At least, I have never heard that it makes such a sound in its progress."

"Oh! it is not that. Be as careful as you can, and make no more noise than you can help, for I do not want our presence to be suspected."

"Certainly not, but I don't see how you are to help a dry twig snapping under your feet."

"Oh! no; and such a sound would pass unnoticed. Be quick! Why, hang it all, it's gone!"

"Gone? So it has. Dear me, how sudden!"

"Hush! don't speak loud. Voices travel a long way in these silent places. I dare say we shall see it reappear directly."

They were mistaken.

One, two, three—five minutes elapsed, but no signs of the light could be seen.

"This is very odd," said Tom King. "However, don't let us hang back. I can see just where the light vanished from. I have had my eyes fixed on the spot and have never moved them once."

"Lead on, then, as straight as you can!"

Tom King, taking hold of his companion's coat, walked on carefully. Their progress was not rapid, for the ground rose rather suddenly.

Without speaking another word, for fear their voices should travel before them, they breasted this little hill and looked around.

They did not see the light at first, but a more careful observation brought to view a very faint light far down beneath them.

It was quite stationary.

Turpin and King both saw it simultaneously, and with greater caution than ever made their way towards it.

Rather more than a dozen steps brought them to the brink of a dingle.

As well as they could make out it was about fourteen feet in depth, and the sides were literally covered with rank vegetation, such as is common to such spots.

The light seemed to be just at the very bottom.

And now, as they listened at the top of this dell, there came up to their ears a sound which they immediately recognised.

Some one was digging.

The sound of a foot striking upon a spade, and of earth being thrown up, could be plainly enough heard.

There was something mysterious and provocative of curiosity in the fact of any one penetrating so far into the forest at so late an hour, and then, in that lone-some spot, making an excavation, that the highwaymen both found their interest in what was going on increase tenfold, and they bent over the ridge anxiously.

Presently King felt his companion's hand upon his shoulder.

"What now?" he asked, in a scarcely audible whisper.

"The sides of this dingle," replied Turpin, "are so thickly wooded that it would be impossible for us to descend without causing sufficient noise to attract observation towards us."

"I am aware of that."

"But I have found what seems to be a narrow, beaten path, leading circuitously to the bottom. Now, I think if we exercise proper caution, we can make our way down without our footsteps being heard."

"Yes, yes! Where is the path?"

"Here it is, Tom. Let me go first, and then you will see!"

"Agreed! Go on!"

Treading on his toes, and taking long, silent strides, Turpin preceded King down a path not more than eight inches wide, that seemed to run corkscrew-like to the bottom.

The shrubs with which the sides of the dingle were lined rose up almost to their waists on each side of them, but still, as none grew on the path itself, they were able to descend without making sufficient noise to be the means of attracting notice to them.

As they went lower and lower, the sound of the man digging—for that was what they concluded it to be—got louder and louder.

If any one had asked our friends what they expected to find on reaching the bottom of the dingle, they would

have unhesitatingly replied, some ruffian who, in that deserted spot, was endeavouring to hide the evidences of his crime.

In fact, that some one was digging a grave.

How great, therefore, was their surprise, when they saw through the bushes the form of an old gannet man, the very reverse of what they had expected to see.

But it was he evidently who had so puzzled Turpin and King with the light, for on a mound of the earth he had turned up was a common stable lantern.

Under most circumstances it was, no doubt, considered to give forth a very insufficient amount of illuminating power, but in that intensely dark dell it seemed enough to reveal everything.

Its rays fell with full force upon the face and form of the old man who was digging, and our friends examined him attentively.

From his thin, white locks, sunken eyes, and attenuated frame, one would have judged his age to be something remarkable, and yet there was none of that stiffness in his limbs which is apparent in men who are far down in the vale of life.

On the contrary, his arms, which were bare to the shoulders—for he appeared to have taken off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves in order to better execute his task—although little more than skin and bone, were yet sinewy and strong, and he seemed to stand firmly and erectly upon his legs.

But upon his shrunken and emaciated countenance was written plainly the word *AVARICE*.

Mingled with that expression now, though, was one of apprehensive terror.

His spade was clutched tightly in his hands.

His head bent forward as if to listen.

Then in a strange, piping voice, he spoke—

“I thought I heard some one,” he said; “but all is still now, quite still. I can hear the rustling of the branches, but that is all. I fancied, too, on my way here I heard strange sounds behind me, but I did not look back, I did not look back!”

He shook his head tremulously to and fro as he repeated the words.

“They say there are strange sounds to be heard, and horrible sights to be seen, in the forest after dark, but I don’t fear them. I don’t—ha! ha!—believe in such nonsense. There is only one thing I believe in, and that is gold, bright gold—ha! ha!—and I only fear those who are strong enough to deprive me of it. I thought I heard some one creeping after me, but I suppose that was only my fancy. It is very hard to think a man cannot get a few pounds together without having everybody after him. It’s very hard, too, to think that I should be obliged to bring my money to this place at night to hide it. If I had it at home, I should not be able to sleep in my bed; but it is safe here, quite safe.”

The wretched old miser—for such he was—recommenced his toil.

So close as the two highwaymen were to him, neither could have spoken a syllable without running the risk of being overheard, and they did not want just then to make themselves apparent.

But it strikes us that if the thought that two such notorious characters as Dick Turpin and Tom King knew of the exact locality of his hidden treasure he would, to use his own expression, have never been able to sleep in bed.

Presently the old man found it necessary to rest again from his labour.

“It is terrible tiring work,” he said, half-aloud and half to himself—“terrible tiring work. I should think now I cannot be many inches off the iron casket which contains my riches. It is not much, but there are plenty who would not scruple to rob a poor man of his hard-earned gains.”

“I shall be rich some day,” he added, after a moment’s silence, “and I shan’t want to save up then as I do now. Very soon I shall have enough to live on, and then these hard, fatiguing night-excursions to the recesses of the forest will be at an end. I shall be glad of that, very glad. Five minutes more, and I shall reach the box, and then, when I have added what I have brought with me to-night, I can feast my eyes with its contents. Oh! it is a brave sight—a brave sight!”

The poor wretch—for, though he possessed doubtless a

larger sum of money than many a rich man, he was a poor wretch—the poor wretch, we say, once more bent his back to his task.

Shovelful after shovelful were thrown out on to the mound.

Suddenly the miser stopped, and pressed both his hands to the side of his head.

An idea—so horrible that it almost destroyed his reason—flashed upon his brain.

The agony he endured was something awful, and surely a foretaste of that punishment to which he was so justly decreed.

But it was only for a brief instant that he stood thus. Uttering a wild, yelling shriek, which echoed and echoed through the trees, startling many a bird from its perch, the miser snatched up the spade and threw up the earth at a furious rate, until he had made another mound of the same height as the former one.

And all this while he never gave vent to a sound.

The whole of the faculties he possessed seemed to be centred in turning up the earth.

The rate he worked at would have been surprising in a young man, but what was it in a feeble, emaciated frame like his?

Simply astounding.

“My gold!” he shrieked, with terrible agony in his tones. “My gold—my treasure—the fruits of a long life of penury and grasping! Who has been here? Am I mad, or dreaming, or what am I? No—no, I am here, in the dingle where I hid my gold, but it has been stolen from me! It is gone—gone. Some one has dogged my feet and deprived me of my all—of all that I cared to live for. No—no, it cannot be true! It would be too, too horrible. I must have missed the spot, and yet I marked it well. No—no, I did not miss the spot, but, he! he! how funny! I have not dug deep enough! Ha! ha! not dug deep enough. What an old fool I must have been to make such a mistake and frighten myself so much!—he! he! I should never have believed I could have done such a foolish thing! I must dig deeper and I shall find it then, of course!”

There was something so horribly dissonant and unnatural about the miser’s laugh that Turpin and King shuddered involuntarily.

It was wonderful to see with what breathless rapidity the old man threw out the soil.

At last he stopped.

The delusion with which he had endeavoured to cheat his mind could now no longer be maintained. He knew he had dug many feet below the spot where he had concealed his treasure. He knew that he had made no mistake in its whereabouts; he knew, too, worst of all, that some one had been there before him—that his precious gold was gone.

For a moment or two he stood incapable of speech or motion, but his thoughts were busy, and his brain dizzy and whirling.

Then he found his voice.

It was choked with sobs.

His anguish, no doubt, was great indeed—greater than many can perhaps imagine.

Large tears of agony started from his eyes, and streamed down his sunken cheeks.

“My gold! my gold!” he said; “who is it that has stolen what I prized more than life itself? May my withering curse cling to him through all eternity! May he be bereft of all he holds dear in this world, even as I have been! Oh! I am old now; old, old! My strength is gone, and I cannot live long enough to save any money now. I shall die as I knew I should—as I always said I should—a pauper, a pauper!”

He sat down upon the edge of the excavation he had made, and looked down into it.

“The long, long years of toil it cost me! The privations I endured in order to add to its amount, if it was ever so little, for I knew those little sums would tell up some day, and now it is gone, all gone; gone at once. I have only now left to me that little I have about me. Oh! what shall I do? What will become of me?”

Then his voice became suffocated in his sobs.

Presently, however, he recovered himself, and sprang suddenly to his feet.

The soft night breeze blew his long hair from his face, and made it stream in a strange fashion behind him.



[TOM KING AND DICK WATCH THE MISER DIG FOR HIS TREASURE.]

His hands were clenched tightly.

The fire of insanity was in his eyes.

"I know what I will do now!" he yelled, in startling tones. "I know what I will do! I will seek him who has robbed me of my treasure, seek him by day and by night unceasingly! I shall find him, for my wrongs will urge me on. I shall find him, and then let him beware! I am a poor, weak old man, but yet I have power left to rob him of a treasure which he can never regain, and which, perhaps, he values almost as much as I did my darling gold! I will find him, and then I will take his life! Not all at once, as he deprived me of my treasure, but bit by bit, drop by drop! I will find him! I—ah!—help!"

The loud report of a pistol rung on the night air,

The miser pressed his hands upon his breast.

His body swayed to and fro.

He made frantic efforts to stand.

He tried to shriek, but his lungs were filling rapidly with blood.

A sickening, gurgling sound alone came from his lips. Then he turned slowly round upon his heels, staggered, and, uttering a strange, gasping sob, fell headlong backwards into the hole he had dug with so much toil.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DEAL RETRIBUTION TO THE MURDERER OF THE OLD MISER.

OUR two friends were so much absorbed by the strange scene in the dell, that, had their lives depended upon it, they could not have stirred a step.

When, however, the report of the pistol came so unexpectedly upon their ears, both gave a sudden start and almost lost their footing.

By an impulse which he could not control, Dick sprang forward, but Tom King held him back as he whispered impressively—

"Silence! Do not stir! We shall see the man who fired that cowardly shot, or I am mistaken!"

Dick obeyed.

"At the same moment a great rustling among the trees took place, but, of course, in the profound darkness they could see nothing.

Then they heard a heavy footstep crunching on the gravelly soil.

With their eyes wide open and their heads stretched forward, the highwaymen waited with indescribable impatience for this individual to make his appearance.

They were not long kept in suspense.

The lantern which the miser had placed upon the little mound of earth still shed its faint glimmering light upon the scene.

But it was on the bleeding corpse of the old man that its rays fell with the most force and intensity.

To the excited fancy of the highwaymen it seemed as though the light had concentrated itself there specially.

But this was only fancy, for something, at first dim and undefined, came within the sphere of the lantern's beams, and at a considerable distance from the body.

Presently this something came more fully into the influence of the light.

And then they saw a man.

He was advancing in a strange, creeping, stooping fashion.

But as he came from the opposite side of the dingle to that upon which our friends were standing, they of course saw his face with great distinctness.

It seemed terribly repulsive—most likely more so than it really was. It was seen under peculiar circumstances, and such as were by no means to his advantage.

When within about six paces of the old miser's body this man paused.

He put up his hand to shade the beams of the lantern from his eyes while he took a long look at his victim.

Then he spoke in a deep, hoarse whisper.

"Is—is he dead?" he asked. "Is he quite dead?"

He seems still enough! He—he must be dead! I have used a pistol too often to miss a mark like that! He must be dead—dead! Ha! Mercy—mercy! Help! help!"

He uttered loud screams and flung himself upon his knees.

And yet there was, to all appearance, nothing to cause this sudden outbreak of terror and alarm.

Our friends could not fail to be much startled by it, and they looked round with something like dismay, wondering what was going to happen next.

But all remained just as it was before.

Quite bewildered, the highwaymen kept their eyes upon the man who, after making several unsuccessful efforts, at last rose to his feet.

With an intensity and anxiety which cannot be described, our friends listened for this man to speak.

It was from his lips alone that they could hope to learn the reason of his mysterious fear.

He soon spoke.

"What a fool I must be!" he said, nervously, "to frighten myself in that way. It was n—nothing after all. Nothing! I thought I felt some one clutch me by the throat! Could it have been but fancy! No—no! It was—it was something! I felt something touch me, surely! What was it? What was it?"

He looked upon the ground near his feet, as well as his trembling limbs would allow him.

"Of course; why this must be it, and so I have alarmed myself with nothing! This little branch it was that fell from one of the trees above, and struck me on the back, I suppose. Curse it!"

He threw the branch upon the ground as he spoke.

The cause of the poor wretch's terror was now sufficiently explained.

By some means, a little branch from one of the trees had become disengaged from its hold upon the parent stem, and falling down, had struck the murderer upon the back, filling his very soul with a mortal terror, such as he had never before felt.

How true it is a guilty conscience needs no seer.

Considerably relieved, our friends continued to watch him attentively.

It would seem as though he had gathered courage from the discovery he had just made, for he walked now quite up to his victim.

"He is dead, sure enough, and I—I am a murderer! I have shot many a bird and many an animal before to-day, but never a human being! But why did he tempt his fate? My life would have been one continual dread if he had lived after he swore to haunt me! It was his own fault—his own fault! Surely, what I did was but acting in my own defence!"

In this way, as he stooped over the stark and prostrate corpse, did the murderer endeavour to deceive his conscience.

"I will bury him here—here, where he buried his treasure! He cannot grumble at that, surely. Then I will flee far, far from this spot, which to me will be always full of horrors! With his riches I shall be able to live like the great ones of the land. Ha! that were indeed worth something! I shall soon forget, in the pleasure of possessing it, the manner in which I obtained the wealth—very soon. And then all will be well."

"No, villain!" cried Dick, in his loud, clear voice, which struck terror to the soul of the guilty man; "no, all will not be well. Murder will out! With the death of a human body there arises an invisible avenger which pursues the murderer until the ends of justice are appeased!"

"Ha!" yelled the man, as he turned to fly; "discovered! A thousand curses! All is lost now!"

But he was not suffered to escape. King sprang forward, and grasped him tightly by the throat.

And then this man, who in more than one respect resembled one of those ferocious animals which fight only when placed at bay, faced about and commenced a desperate struggle with his captor.

He was a tall, powerful man, and now despair seemed to have redoubled his strength; and King felt that if he wished to secure him he would have to call his friend to his assistance.

Turpin sprang forward.

Between them the murderer stood not the ghost of a chance, and he was overpowered almost immediately.

King placed his foot upon his breast, and, drawing his hanger, held it at his throat.

Its sharp point just penetrated the skin.

"Move hand or foot," said King, "and you are a dead man. Now answer me, and truly: who is it you have so treacherously murdered?"

The man remained doggedly silent.

"Answer," said King, again: "who is it you have shot in so cowardly a manner?"

Still no reply.

Tom pressed slightly upon the hilt of his hanger, and, as the murderer felt it entering the flesh, he cried—

"Curse you both! would you murder me by inches? It was my master."

"Your master! Then the crime is doubly enormous! What was his name? Who was he?"

"Olinthus Furze, the miser."

"It was you, then, that came here and dug up the old man's treasure-box. To what place have you removed it?"

"I will not tell you," said the man, fiercely. "You shall kill me first!"

"Now, look here, Tom," said Dick, who had been very busily engaged about something during the past few minutes. "Look here, Tom, I will show you how to deal out retribution to this fellow."

King turned round, and saw his comrade holding a piece of rope with a large noose at the end of it towards him!

"Are you going to hang him?"

"Yes, but not by the neck, though. You keep him in his place, and I will slip it over him!"

And, although he experienced considerable difficulty, Turpin slipped the noose over the man's head, and drew it tight under the armpits.

The other end of the rope had been cast over the stout limb of a tree a few feet overhead.

Dick began to haul him up.

The man shrieked, and kicked, and struggled, but all in vain!

Up he went.

They drew him up until his feet were about four feet from the ground.

Then the highwaymen secured the rope to the trunk of the tree.

The murderer swung round and round, and swayed to and fro.

The expression of his face was so awful that when they saw it the highwaymen shudderingly withdrew their gaze.

The rays of the lantern still played upon the form of the old miser, and upon this object the eyes of the murderer were fixed as if with some terrible fascination.

"Here you will remain," said Dick, "in the company of the whom you have deprived of life until some one shall find you here, and convey you to the nearest prison."

"Curse on you!" howled the man; "curse on you both! What was it I did to you? Why did you interfere with me? Curse on you!"

"You can cry out as loudly as you please," said Tom King, "some one will doubtless hear your shouts. May the terrible spectacle before you prove some slight punishment for the deed you have done."

As he spoke, Tom and Turpin picked up the ball of string, and began to thread their way back to the place where they had left their horses.

It was well they took the precaution, for, without some such guide, it would have been impossible on that dark night to have found their way through the mazes of the forest.

The loud shouts and frantic screams of the murderer of the old miser echoed and re-echoed along the glades, rousing from their night's repose many a wild denizen of the forest.

At last they ceased with a suddenness and abruptness that was startling in the extreme.

CHAPTER XLII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE OVERWHELMED WITH ADVENTURES OF THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY DESCRIPTION.

"What is the meaning of that?" asked Tom, of his companion.

"I hardly know, but I was thinking just as you spoke about the miser's casket of gold!"

"Well?"

"Oh! nothing, only I cannot help thinking that it is not far from where we stood."

"What makes you think that?"

"I'll tell you. But while I do so let us retrace our steps to the dingle and ascertain the meaning of the cessation of the man's shouts."

"Is it worth while, think you?"

"I do. I am sure of it. Listen!"

"I am all attention."

"In the first place, then, let us set about to account for the presence of the murderer at the spot where the robbery was committed, and at so late an hour."

"That, I presume," said Tom, "can be accounted for in two ways. Either he had only just removed the casket and had not time to get away before his master came, or I think, most likely, he had, after taking it from his hiding-place, merely secreted it somewhere in the bushes, and had visited the place to-night to carry it off completely."

"Exactly. Now, under either of these circumstances, the casket of gold must be somewhere close to the dingle."

"Of course."

"Very well, then, don't you consider it would be very wrong on our parts to leave such a treasure to the chance finding of anyone?"

"H—m! perhaps it would! But what could we do with it, and, to tell you the truth, Dick, I don't like the idea of having anything more to do with it. The miser's curse will cling to it, and it will I fancy prove anything but a blessing to its possessor."

"Pho—pho! Tom. Shake off such foolish notions as those I beg. Really now, I did not think you were so superstitious."

"Don't laugh at it my friend. You will find it turn out a serious matter."

"Oh stuff! Now look here, I'll tell you what I'll do."

They reached the brim of the dingle as he spoke, and they paused there to continue the conversation.

"Well?"

"Let us look about the dell in every part until we find the casket. We will then bury it in some place that we shall easily recognise at a future time. Of course, I needn't tell you anything about the precarious nature of

our profession, and who knows, if we bury this treasure, that we may not some day be very glad of it, and find it of the utmost service."

"Who, indeed?"

"You consent, then?"

"That we shall look about in the endeavour to find the casket? Yes."

"And if we do find it, to bury it?"

"Yes."

"Come on, then! Be careful of your footing! What can have caused the man to be silent so suddenly, I wonder?"

"We shall soon know that. I can just see him now. How very still he hangs! Is he dead?"

"I should think it would be scarcely probable. And yet I don't know, either. He might be!"

"He might!"

"I hope not, however, for I am greatly in hopes of being able to extort from him some particulars respecting the whereabouts of the casket."

While speaking, they had reached the bottom of the dingle.

The lantern still burned clearly, and Tom King went towards it and took it up.

Then, carefully avoiding the bleeding body of the miser, he made a detour, and reached the tree to which he had suspended the servant.

He cast the light upwards.

"Your hopes of learning anything are at an end, Dick. See, he is quite dead! He must have shouted until he broke a blood-vessel; for see, it has streamed all down his clothing, and is even now bubbling from his mouth!"

"Turn the light away, Tom, I cannot bear to look upon him. Well, he has met with no more than his deserts!"

"True, and yet when these signs of the tragedy are discovered, as they are sure to be sooner or later, how inexplicable it will all appear!"

"I think myself they will have some difficulty in arriving at a correct solution of the affair."

"If they are left to draw their own conclusions from what they see they certainly will; but I think we shall be only doing our duty by leaving them some clue."

"What do you propose?"

"Oh! it can be done simply enough. Get your lead pencil, and write a few words upon the leaf of a pocket-book, and place it somewhere about his person."

"A good thought; it shall be done. I have, though, one little amendment to propose."

"What is that?"

"Why that you write the document."

"Oh, very well; just as you like."

"Why the fact is, where I went to school we did not pay much attention to writing and such like. Now I know you are a good scholar."

"Middling, as to that. Still I can manage a job of that sort."

"Very good, then; suppose you begin at once, because the sooner we get back to the horses the better."

"Just so," said Tom, as he took out an elaborate pocket-book, and prepared to write; "what shall I say?"

"I shall leave that to you."

Tom sucked the end of the pencil very deliberately, in order to collect his thoughts.

Then he wrote, bearing very hard upon the paper, so that the writing should be as black as possible, the following words:

"We, Richard Turpin and Thomas King, do hereby certify that, having witnessed this man, whose name we do not know, commit a deliberate murder upon the person of one whom we believe to be known as Olinthus Furze, the miser, did pass a rope under his arm pits and suspend him to this tree in order that he might be discovered and punished for his crime, which we cordially detest."

"And we hereby further certify that, hearing his shouts and screams suddenly cease, we did retrace our steps to learn the cause, and found him dead and bleeding from the mouth, having apparently broken a blood-vessel in his frantic screams."

"(Signed)

"RICHARD TURPIN.
"THOMAS KING."

"That will do capital," said Dick, as Tom finished reading it to him,—"capital! And now put it into one of his pockets."

This was done.

"Thank goodness!" said King, "he's done with. And now about this treasure. If you'll take my advice, my friend, you will not meddle with it."

"Pho! pho! I am ashamed of you. Come along." Rather unwillingly, King again took up the water and followed Dick, who commenced a very systematic examination of the dingle.

At last, and just as he was beginning to despair, he struck against something which was partly on the brink of the dell.

He made an examination of the object instantly. It was a large oak box, crossed and recrossed in every direction with stout bands of iron.

"Here you are, Tom," he cried, in an exulting voice. Bravo! it's close to the top, so we shan't have the job of pulling it up, and there are handles on each side, I declare. Why, if you take hold of one handle and I take hold of the other, we shall carry it off first rate."

"Ah! yes, I dare say. We shall want the spade though, and as you are so anxious about the job you had better go down and fetch it, and take hold of the string at the same time! You had forgotten that, hadn't you?"

"I had, for the moment! but, however, if you have any objection to going, stay here for a moment, and I will quickly fetch the spade."

Without waiting for a reply, Dick plunged quickly into the dell, and in a few moments returned with the articles of which he went in quest.

Then, together, the two highwaymen carried the box for some distance into the recesses of the forest.

It was very hard work, for the box was a great weight.

About fifty yards from the dell was a tree, with a monstrous hollow trunk, from the summit of which there grew out a young tree.

This could not fail to be an unusual object, and therefore was well qualified, on that account, to point out where the treasure was hidden.

"You couldn't find a better place if you searched the whole forest over," said Dick, as he reached it, "and so here goes!"

There was a piece of level ground near the trunk of the tree, and Dick with the spade very carefully cut away the turf in long strips, about a foot in width, which he placed on one side, so that when the hole was filled up, the turf could be replaced, and so the ground show no symptoms of having been disturbed.

Dick set to work with a will, and soon had a tolerable sized hole dug.

Tom King sat down upon the edge of the miser's box.

It was not necessary to dig to any great depth, so the pit was not long before it was in readiness to receive its precious contents.

As they lowered it into the hole, Dick felt a very strong inclination to open the box, but the fastenings were of so complicated a character, that, after making one abortive effort, he gave up the attempt in despair.

"You must bury your riches unseen, my friend," said Tom King, "and if you will be guided by me, you will let them always remain where they are."

"How absurd! Do you think any luck, good or bad, attaches itself to the treasure? Nonsense! Now, I contend it will be vastly pleasant, when we are distressed for money, to know just where to put our hands upon a large sum."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so! Come, do not linger over your work! I think it's quite time we got back to look after our cattle."

"It is, Tom," said Dick, as he patted the turf down in its place. "I don't like the idea of leaving them at all; but I have done now. I will just take one more look round at the place, and then we will be off."

They did so, and Turpin caught hold of the string which they had provided as a clue, and once more threaded the intricacies of the old forest.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE GIPSIES AFFORD SHELTER TO THE HIGHWAYMEN.

WITHOUT any accident, save that of stumbling occasionally over some projecting root, our friends reached the place where they had left their steeds.

Both animals were stretched upon the grass. They could not be other than much fatigued.

Upon, however, hearing their owners approach both started to their feet.

"And now, Tom," said Turpin, as he settled himself in his saddle, "what are we to do next?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but one thing is certain: we must stop somewhere, not so much on account of ourselves as our horses."

"True. And yet they ought, I think, to hold out, if we travel gently, until daybreak."

"They will have to do so if we cannot find a halting-place. And now, which way do we go—to the right, or the left, or straight on?"

"To the right, I fancy. We will keep as much as possible upon the edge of the trees."

They did so, and for hours and hours they continued on their route without meeting with a single person or seeing a sign of a human habitation.

Horses and riders were completely tired down by the time the first flush of dawn appeared in the eastern sky.

They were glad when they saw this token of the coming day. It seemed to promise repose for a short time, and also served to indicate their course.

They found they were but little out of their way, and soon a low hedge or a low hedge into the highroad.

"Surely, now," cried King, "we cannot go far without meeting with some place where we can shelter for a little time."

"One would think not. It is a high dawn this morning, Tom; we shall have a glorious day."

"I think so, myself. Ah! already I can see the edge of the sun's disc; and look! is not that a wreath of smoke curling up yonder?"

"It is. From some farmhouse or cottage, probably. Let us hasten."

King urged his horse to make a little better speed, and a word from her rider caused Bess to make a sudden dash forwards.

The smoke which the highwayman's keen glance had detected was some distance ahead of them, and considerably west of the highroad they were travelling.

They found it necessary, therefore, in a short space of time, to forsake the highway and strike across the fields.

The soft turf was peculiarly grateful to the tired horses' hoofs.

After crossing several meadows, they reached the brow of a hill—if hill it could be called, for in reality it was little more than a piece of rising ground—and, looking down, saw at their feet a gipsies' camp.

There were two or three of their houses upon wheels grouped round, and an equal number of canvas tents.

In the centre of the circle which these objects formed, was a fire, made chiefly of green twigs, and which sent up the dark blue vapour which had arrested King's attention.

About a dozen persons—men, women, and children—were crouching around this fire, and watching anxiously a large iron pot, which was suspended in the usual fashion over the flames.

"This will be the very thing for us," said Dick. "I have more than once had occasion to seek shelter from these strange, wandering people, and always found them faithful. Come on, Tom, we shall be almost sure of meeting with a welcome."

King needed no pressing to do this, and, alighting from his steed, he made his way down the hill on foot.

Dick followed his example.

At the sound of their tread upon the grass, the gipsies turned round, and then rose one and all to their feet.

A man who might perhaps be considered handsome, were it not for his beetling brows, stood forward from the rest.

"What want you, strangers, with the Zingari? Speak, let us know your will."

"We are travellers, and, as you say, strangers—that is, to this part of the country. Our horses have been for many hours upon the road, and we seek food and shelter for them, and for ourselves who need it scarcely less than they do."

"You are welcome to the tents of the Zingari," said the man. "Fear nothing! Truth is stamped upon both your countenances. Hi! Sebel! Sebel!"

A lad of about sixteen came forward, to whom the two addressed some words in the gipsy tongue.

Of course, neither of our friends knew what had been said, but they had no difficulty in guessing the import of the words, for the boy advanced to their steeds, taking each by the bridle.

Turpin made a step forward as if to follow him, but King detained him, as he whispered—

"These are strange people, and you must be careful in your behaviour. Just watch whereabouts he bestows the cattle, but do no more. They will be safe beyond a doubt. Let us hasten to eat with them, for when we have, no temptation on earth would be powerful enough to make them betray us; nay, if we are attacked, they will even defend us with their— Hush! say nothing! If we whisper thus, we shall perhaps make them suspicious of us!"

This reasoning was so cogent that Dick said not another word, but turned towards the man who had greeted them. He was looking at them attentively.

"The fare of the poor Zingari is hard," he said, "but the weary stranger is welcome to a share. We cannot long afford them shelter, for we are about to depart."

"The deuce you are," muttered Dick, and then he added—

"It is not so much food as rest that we require, though we are sadly in want of both. If you will allow us to join you in the consumption of the meal you are preparing, and then let us rest somewhere, we shall not only thank you, but leave some substantial token of our gratitude behind."

"You are welcome," said the gipsy, who seemed by no means displeased at this promise of payment for services rendered. "Sebel will tend your steeds! Advance, and we will break bread with you."

Five minutes more saw Turpin and King seated with the gipsies round the fire, and apparently quite at home. They jested, laughed, and talked to each other as though they had been acquaintances of many years standing.

As the gipsy had said, the fare was by no means sumptuous. It consisted of a stew, which both our friends pronounced as being most delicious, and only needed the accompaniment of something stronger than water to make it a first-rate meal.

The production of a couple of guineas proved sufficient to induce the wanderers to postpone their intended journey, so a tent was provided for the two highwaymen, into which they soon afterwards passed, and, as they felt in no way apprehensive of danger, either from attack or treachery, they stretched themselves upon the rude pallets prepared for them, and in a few minutes were sound asleep.

The sun had passed the meridian when they awoke and looked out of the tent.

All was calm around them. The sky was without a cloud, and birds were chirping merrily from every bough.

The gipsy who seemed to be in some sort of command over the others, upon seeing the friends at the opening of their tent, walked rapidly towards them.

"The strangers have slept long and soundly in the gipsy's tent," he said. "The sun has already begun his downward course, and the people are impatient to begin their march."

"And we are quite ready to go," said Dick, as he stepped outside. "Fetch us our horses, and we will be off!"

"It shall be done," said the gipsy, moving rapidly away.

"I feel now," said King, "as though I should like a good swill. That would be a refresher."

"You can have it then," said Dick, "I am certain, for I can hear a stream bubbling somewhere close at hand."

"And so can I now. It seems to be just beyond those shrubs there."

"It does," replied King, as he hurried forward in the direction indicated.

On the other side of the shrubs Dick had mentioned was a scene of rare picturesqueness.

Before them was a little hollow, down one side of which flowed a pleasant little brook, which, as it danced over the mimic obstructions in its course, created the pleasant gurgling sound which had been the means of directing Dick's attention to it.

The water was clear and cold, and the highwaymen dashed it plentifully over their faces.

Considerably refreshed by this primitive ablution, they rose to their feet and made their way back.

They saw the gipsy and the boy Sebel standing near the

tent with the horses, which had been carefully groomed down, so that they looked quite fresh and vigorous.

Turpin's eye brightened as his glance lighted on his mare.

As he sprang upon her back, she uttered a low neigh of pleasure.

King also mounted.

Then, giving the gipsies a liberal gratuity, and especially the boy for the care he had taken of the horses, the two highwaymen, at a gentle trot, regained the highroad, and continued their journey.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TURPIN AND KING ACHIEVE A RATHER LUDICROUS ADVENTURE WITH CAPTAIN SALEM NIDGET OF H.M. SHIP "Plover."

"It is a lovely morning, Dick, is it not? I do enjoy it! Let us go at a more easy rate; there is no occasion now for hurry."

"It is Bess. When she has had a good rest, there is no such thing as holding her in."

"So it appears. And now, do you know, I fancy we have come quite far enough to commence operations."

"I was thinking so a few moments ago, and was going to ask you how much longer you intended to keep on like this, when you spoke."

"Then, my opinion is, the sooner we begin business the better. It will be, I take it, a very profitable place; still, we must be careful not to decrease our distance from London, but approach rather to the sea-shore."

"Very good. I advise, then, that we look to our pistols, so that, should anything occur, we may be prepared."

They drew up for a moment, while they re-primed and loaded their weapons, and then proceeded on their way.

Those who have visited this portion of the country will not need to be told of its exceeding beauty; and our friends, who had a keen appreciation of the beauties of nature, but not much for those of art, enjoyed the prospect amazingly.

At four o'clock they had only passed a few houses, and had not met with anything of importance on the road.

This was rather surprising and quite at variance with their anticipations.

But presently, at the very extremity of a long line of road, they saw a faint cloud of dust arise.

"Here is something at last!" cried Dick, "really I had begun to despair of meeting with an adventure before night."

"So had I."

They walked on very gently.

The cloud of dust, as it came nearer and nearer, increased rapidly in size.

Now our readers will doubtless think to themselves, Dick Turpin and Tom King were daring men, but surely the writer does not wish to make us believe that he contemplated stopping a carriage on the highroad at daylight. But we do, and a few moments' reflection will show that there is nothing so very improbable or impossible about it.

A reference to the newspapers of the period will show that it was by no means a rarity for people to be stopped on the highroad in the daytime, and even within sight of their own dwellings.

In a little while the highwaymen were able to distinguish through the dust the outline of a carriage.

It was a very showy affair apparently, and was drawn by four horses, attended by two postillions.

"This is a wedding set out, you may depend," said Dick; "I can see very plain we are going to have some fun."

"I have no objection," said King, "provided a little profit attaches to it."

"Get out! you are always looking after the leaves and fishes. Now I should be content if there was only a little pleasure to be derived from this adventure."

"We shall see. However, Tom, you take one side of the road and manage the postillions, while I go on the other and peep at those inside."

"As you like," said Tom; "they will be here directly."

"Yes; now then. Trot forward, not fast enough, however, to excite suspicion."

"All right."

The carriage was now only about fifty yards from them, and the distance was, of course, diminishing every moment.

That their first conjecture that it was a wedding carriage was a correct one there could be little doubt.

The postilions seemed to take no particular notice of the two advancing horsemen, and their astonishment was most unbounded when Tom King rode close to them and shouted—

"Pull up, or I fire!"

The rays of the declining sun glistened dazzlingly upon the long barrel of the pistol which Tom King held out at arm's length.

The postilions, as the reflection flashed into their eyes, stopped the carriage at once.

Before, though, Dick could reach the carriage door, the window was let down violently, and a head projected out of it.

It was a remarkable looking head.

The face was very full, and of a deep crimson hue, to which a very white powdered wig formed a peculiar contrast.

His first words betokened his profession, even if his attire did not.

"Avast, there, you swabs!" he shouted. "Avast! What do you mean by overhauling us? If it wasn't that I have just got married, and don't want to frighten my wife, I would pretty soon settle you, you piratical rascals!"

"Easy does it!" said Dick, who saw at a glance the speaker was unharmed. "Easy does it! We want your purse and watch, and so forth."

"And you call that easy, you loblolly, do you? You want a good rope's-ending at the grating, and if I'd got you aboard my little ship *Pluwer* you'd very soon have it."

"Oh! indeed! Then I presume you are the captain of the *Plover*, or *Pluwer* as you call it; eh?"

"Yes, you son of a gun! I—"

"Then just hand over a good booty."

"Never!" said the captain, in a towering passion, as he sank back into his seat.

Then Turpin caught sight of a female with a very graceful figure, and pleasing countenance.

Dick took off his hat and made a very deep bow.

The lady returned the salute.

The captain uttered a suppressed growl, but as he had no weapons he did not relish attacking our hero, who held a pistol negligently in his hand.

"Surely, madam," said Dick, with his head still uncovered, "surely you will not object to myself and friend drinking your very good health and happiness in the married state?"

The bride made no reply.

"Then I shall consider silence gives consent. Come, captain, hand over your purse like a sensible man, for heaven knows I wish there to be no bloodshed or violence. Let me request you to advise him to do as I require," added Turpin, turning again to the bride.

"Now, Salem, give him your purse, there's a good man, and let us go on our way in comfort!"

"Never!" said the captain. "I have never struck to the enemy, yet, and, damme! I never will. I can't defend myself, you land pirate, and you'll have to take all you get."

"Very good," said Dick, "if you prefer it, I don't mind."

So saying, he very skilfully took the captain's watch out of his fob.

It was a chronometer set in a gold case, and attached to a massive gold chain, at the other extremity of which dangled some very large seals.

The captain of the *Plover* could not restrain a groan when he saw it disappear in the profundities of the highwayman's pocket.

"And now your purse," said Dick. "Remember, discretion is the better part of valour."

"For heaven's sake take it and be off," said the captain.

"All right! And now, madam," said Turpin, in his most insinuating tones, "let me exact a tribute from you. I will not take anything from you in the shape of jewels or trinkets, but simply a kiss from your ruby lips."

"By God!" said the captain, springing to his feet,

"this is too much. Damme! I have given in quietly, and now you want to kiss my wife before I have kissed her myself! No, I'm d—d if you shall!"

But the lady blushed, and looked anything but displeased or reluctant to comply with the bold highwayman's demand.

In fact, Dick was a very good-looking fellow, and of a style and colour that is always pleasing to the ladies. Dick shook his hair back from his face and smiled.

The lady bent forward.

But the captain interposed.

"Draw back your smirking figure-head, you piratical swab, or I'll spoil the colour of it, damme! And you, madam, draw back. You are my wife, recollect, and I'll make you suffer for your conduct!"

But Turpin was not so easily to be balked out of his kiss, when he saw that the lady was evidently not disinclined, so he held his pistol at the captain's head significantly.

"Seat yourself," he said. "Remember, I have your life in my hands, and I can deprive you of it in an instant. If you value it, sit down."

Now, Captain Nidget—for such was his name—was a bold enough man in his way, but just then he did not feel desirous of leaving the world and a widow.

So he sank back in his seat, and glared at his wife and the highwayman like some wild animal.

Not heeding him, however, Dick put his arm in the carriage, and taking the lady round the waist, drew her towards him.

She made a show of resistance, but when her face was close to the highwayman's, she suddenly ceased her struggles, and Dick pressed not one, but a dozen kisses on her lips.

They were not only received, but returned.

The husband was furious.

But Dick was aroused from his blissful occupation, by hearing Tom King shout in a loud voice:

"Look out, Dick, look out! Be off at once! Here come the officers again! They are straining every nerve!"

The words were followed by the report of a pistol and the trampling of horses' feet.

CHAPTER XLV.

TURPIN AND KING TAKE REFUGE IN THE OLD MANSION AT DUBLEY CHINE, AND MEET WITH A SERIES OF UNPARALLELED ADVENTURES DURING THEIR STAY THERE.

OUR friends make a slight mistake when they came to the conclusion that the Guildford police-officers had abandoned the chase.

The fact was, they found their horses completely knocked up, so were obliged to come to a standstill, but they sent off one of their band, mounted on the best horse in the troop, to fetch fresh cattle and also a reinforcement. This necessarily delayed them for some time, but they calculated upon the highwaymen relaxing their speed, and perhaps even halting when they found they were no longer pursued, and, therefore, had great hopes that if they could follow they would soon overtake them.

By dint of numerous inquiries on their route, they succeeded in tracing Turpin and King to the gipsies' camp, which they reached only a few hours after they had left it. They spurred on their horses, and saw at last, to their great satisfaction, the persons whom they sought actually robbing a carriage by daylight.

They increased their speed, and it was not until the postilion waved his arm that King knew of their approach. It was then he gave the alarm to Dick in the manner recorded at the end of the last chapter.

At the same time, he himself turned his horse's head round, and set off at full speed, leaving Dick to follow his example as quickly as he could.

Turpin pressed one more kiss upon the bride's lips, and then giving Bess the rein, sped off like the wind.

He overtook Tom King in a few moments.

In the meantime, Captain Nidget learned with great satisfaction that a body of police were close at hand.

He opened the door of the carriage, and stepped out into the roadway a second or so before the officers reached him.

He pulled off his white-powdered wig, and waved it aloft in the air.

"After the pirate!" he cried. "Board ~~the~~ and string 'em up to the yard-arm! They have keel-hauled me, damme, and issed my wife!"

The officers could not contain their laughter. They did not nevertheless, relax their speed, but plied whip and spur most vigorously.

The crosses they had beneath them were of capital quality, and were, besides, quite fresh; so that the highwaymen had everything to fear, and the officers everything to hope, from the pursuit.

King and Turpin, however, had an excellent start, and they took care that the distance between them and the officers should not diminish.

The road, too, beneath their feet was smooth and even. Now, had Turpin been by himself, there is no question he would have been easily enough able to distance his foes in a very short space of time. But then King was not so well mounted as he was, so he had to keep Bess back.

As the officers pressed very hardly upon them, Tom King noticed this fact, and he said, as well as he could, for galloping at such a rate as they were made conversation difficult—

"Leave me to shift for myself, Dick, my boy. I won't consent to allow you to lose your own chance of escaping because my steed is not so good as your own. Shoot ahead as fast as you can, and leave me to my own luck!"

"Nonsense! I shall do nothing of the kind; you know that well enough. Keep your horse as well up as you can. I will stick by you to the last! Remember what they say at sea—"A stern chase is a long chase,"

As he spoke these words, he leaned forward in the saddle and grasped Tom's horse by the bridle.

In this way, he compelled him to gallop faster.

Fortunately they were out of range of the pistols, so they had nothing to fear on that account, so long as they kept up the distance.

They found, by the increasing number of vehicles in the distance, that they were approaching a town, so they turned off to the right across the country.

In some places the cross lanes were very miry, and the horses with difficulty struggled onward.

When dusk came, the relative positions of pursuer and pursued were unchanged.

The officers had determined to hunt them down.

It was something to be wondered at that King's horse had kept up so long and so well as he had, but now he gave evident signs of utter exhaustion.

"I cannot keep up many minutes longer, Dick. Let me advise you, while you have the chance, to clear off and leave me; it is no good for one to destroy the other."

"It seems evident we cannot outrun them, so we must have recourse to a little stratagem. Look, yonder is a dense clump of trees. Now if that should turn out to be a wood of any extent, and we can make our way into its intricacies, I think we may set them at defiance."

Tom King looked in the direction to which his friend pointed, and saw, as he said, something that looked like a wood of considerable size. It doubtless was a portion of the New Forest which had been cut off from the remainder.

"It is our only chance, he said, "and but a faint one, if you make the best of it. Still, there we should be able to hold ourselves at bay."

"It will be a difficult matter to fight so many with any hope of proving victorious."

"How many are there?"

"Eight or nine; I can't tell which."

"That is long odds. We must make the best of it."

And now a new difficulty presented itself.

The wood they were now, of course, anxious to reach as speedily as possible, was on the other side of a hedge, which, though not so high as to be insurmountable under ordinary circumstances, was yet too high for the tired horses now to venture.

The only resource that was left to them was to ride on as swiftly as possible until they came to a gate.

About a quarter of a mile lower down they found one. Dick dismounted and tried to open it, but found it fast.

It was secured by a huge padlock and chain.

A large, round pebble of several pounds' weight was

lying in the lane, and Dick took it up in both hands and dashed it against the lock.

It gave way at once.

He held it open while Tom and Bess passed through. He then closed it and remounted.

But although this had been done quickly, it consumed time, and the officers consequently gained upon them considerably.

The field was a ploughed one.

"Everything seems against us," said Dick. "Here, this field, for instance. We shall have to make our way round the edge of it, along the beaten path. To attempt to cross such heavy ground would be utter madness."

"It would, so we must do the best we can."

At little more than a walking pace they crept along the narrow path, with a deep fetid ditch on one side of them, and the soft ploughed land on the other.

Meanwhile, the officers came galloping down the lane.

They passed the gate though.

Then, evidently, they had not seen our friends pass through it.

A little farther on, however, as they heard nothing of their prey in front, they drew up, and, having listened, consulted with each other as to what they had better do.

They little thought it; but at that very moment all that separated them from the highwaymen was the hedgerow.

Our friends had taken the precaution to draw up so that no sound should reach the ears of their foes; but their care was of no avail, for King's horse suddenly lowered his head, and gave vent to that strange, gasping cough, so often uttered by horses when much distressed.

A curse came from the lips of Tom King, and a shout of gratification from the officers.

They prepared to leap the hedge.

"No, no," they heard a voice say. "Go through the gate!"

"What gate?"

"The one we passed a minute or two ago. Come on!"

The officers retraced their steps.

There was nothing left for our friends but to make as much speed as they possibly could.

The ploughed field led into a meadow.

Across this and another, and then another, with the officers close upon their track they went.

And now the officers found themselves near enough to make use of their firearms, and the report of a pistol suddenly arose.

It was simply a trial shot.

The spent ball struck Dick upon the back.

"That was well aimed," he said, "and if the distance had only been a little less, I should have been done for! Whip your horse! Spur him to the utmost! Do not spare him!"

The officers appeared to be well satisfied with the shot, for it was followed by an irregular volley, which did no harm, save inflicting a few trifling wounds upon the fugitives.

Tom King's horse, although at the last gasp, kept up bravely.

"Now, Tom," exclaimed Dick, as they crossed the last hedge that intervened between them and the wood they were so anxious to reach. "Now, Tom, one more effort, and then all will be well."

Tom King made one more desperate effort. He plunged still deeper his spurs into his horse's sides.

The exhausted creature staggered onwards.

Lead voices, mingled with the discharge of many pistols, called upon them to surrender.

But the highwaymen pay no heed to them. Every nerve is strained to gain the confines of the wood.

It is but a few hundred paces distant from them.

They increase their efforts.

It would seem as though the horses and officers bestrode were almost as much knocked up as the highwaymen's were, for despite the cruelty with which their riders goaded them on, they could scarcely gain upon their prey.

The officers well enough knew that their chances of capturing our friends, should they succeed in reaching the wood, would be materially diminished, but still their tired cattle could not be made to proceed faster.

They reloaded their pistols and fired another volley.

Then Dick heard Tom King utter a sudden exclamation

"What is it, Tom?" he asked. "Are you hit?"
 "It is nothing. A bullet has struck me on the left arm."

"It is not a serious hurt, then?"

"Oh! no. I cannot tell exactly what it is, but it appears to have furrowed the skin from my shoulder to my elbow."

"If that is all, it will not prove serious. Strive again to make your horse keep pace with Bess; a minute or two more will take us into the wood."

In obedience to the application of both whip and spur, the poor animal seemed to concentrate in its limbs the whole of its remaining strength.

The speed it made for the next few seconds was something wonderful, it even shot ahead of Bess herself.

But when the borders of the wood were just reached, it reared suddenly, staggered, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Tom had anticipated this catastrophe, and had therefore prepared himself for it.

When his horse fell, his feet were already freed from the stirrups, and he stood upright, when the horse with a dull heavy thud, reached the ground.

There was no time for regrets, or even for speech.

The officers shouted with gratification when they saw the horse fall. Surely, they thought, we shall have one of them in our power.

But Tom, without pausing a moment, had set off on foot at full speed.

He was an excellent runner.

It was not long before he had the pleasure of finding himself beneath the shadow of the trees.

Then Dick dismounted.

Bess, now, would be an encumbrance, but still they were obliged to put up with that as best they could.

Dick caught her by the bridle, and led her into the mazes of the forest.

The trees in it were very old, and in size, gigantic. They grew closely together, too, and they found many places where it was impossible to force a passage between their trunks.

The soil was covered with gorse and brake in great profusion.

Ere, however, they had advanced many yards, they could hear the officers crushing through the trees.

Fortunately for our friends, the undergrowth and trees, as well as the darkness, prevented the police from keeping them in view.

The gloom in the forest increased at every step they took.

And now it would have been an easy enough matter to have eluded their pursuers if they had not been so close upon their track as they were, but, as it was, the noise they made in their progress sufficed to enable them to keep accurately upon their track.

Still they were in hopes, by pushing vigorously forward, of increasing the distance between them.

In this they appeared to partially succeed, for the sounds of the pursuing footsteps came by no means so distinctly upon their ears as they did.

Then Tom King broke the silence which had been preserved between them since they entered the wood.

He spoke in a low voice.

It might have been that he was faint, or that he did not wish his voice to reach the officers.

"Dick," he said, "Dick."

"What is it, my friend?"

"I am sorry to say it, my friend, but we must come to a halt at once."

"Come to a halt?"

"Yes. I bore up as long as I could, and as well as I could, but I am done up now."

"Good heavens, Tom!" exclaimed Turpin, "what is the matter?"

"My wound is, I fear, more serious than either you or I at first imagined."

"Stop a moment, then, and let me examine it. Is it painful?"

"Not in the least."

"Why did you not speak before? You must have been losing blood at a great rate. However, it is only loss of blood you are suffering from, and I will soon remedy that."

So saying, Dick tore off his scarf hastily, and bound it tightly round Tom's arm.

"That will be better," he said, as he completed his task. "I am sorry you did not mention it earlier. However, take a draught of this."

Dick produced a good-sized flask as he spoke, and handed it to his friend, who took a good draught at it.

"That's real genuine brandy as imported," said Turpin, as he placed the flask to his own lips.

But, short as was the time they had consumed, yet it sufficed for the officers to gain upon them surprisingly.

When the highwaymen looked behind them, they saw, to their great astonishment, a number of lights flashing through the trees.

It was therefore evident that the officers had in some way possessed themselves of either torches or lanterns, which would greatly aid them in their search.

Their having kept so well upon our friends' track can be easily accounted for.

The wound which King had received in his shoulder bled plentifully, and all the way he came he left behind him such a track of blood, that they followed it with the greatest ease.

But now, as the effusion of blood had been stopped, the officers would no longer have this guide.

Tom felt much better after the draught of brandy; he followed Dick through a dense thicket.

The officers must have caught some glimpse at his retreating form, for several pistols were discharged in that direction.

By great good luck, though, neither of them were sufficiently well-aimed to have effect.

The highwayman struggled on, now sinking ankle deep in some slough, and then forcing a passage through the dense vegetation.

The officers were close behind them. Indeed, they seemed to be making much better speed than our friends were.

They were inspired to do this because the only guide they had for their track now was the sound of their footsteps, and they knew when once they lost the sound the highwaymen would easily escape, and so all the trouble they had had would result in nothing.

Hence, they pressed onwards with incredible eagerness.

More than once they fancied they could distinguish the dark forms of those they sought creeping in advance of them, and then pistols would be immediately levelled and discharged.

But although this manoeuvre had been several times repeated, it had not yet produced any results.

Dick felt that Tom drew his breath slowly and laboriously.

His heart grew heavy with anxiety.

"Tom, my boy," he said, "hold up! Don't give in yet, if you can possibly help it. Cheer up, old fellow, we shall do them yet. Take another pull at the brandy!"

"Thanks!"

Tom's voice was very faint.

Without pausing in their speed, Dick again took out his flask, and passed it to his comrade, who took a deep draught in silence.

The spirit had the effect of infusing a fictitious vigour into the muscles of the highwayman, and he strode forward twice as rapidly as he had done before.

But now they made a discovery which much disconcerted them.

The undergrowth was getting more scanty.

The trees grew at a greater distance from each other.

A faint, soft light stole over the scene.

In fine, there was every appearance of their having reached the other side of the wood.

"We are done for, after all, I am afraid," said Turpin, as he one by one noticed these things. "We must bear to the right, Tom; perhaps we shall do better there."

"Impossible! Look! The officers have spread out on each side of us. We should have to fight our way through them."

It was as Tom had said. The officers had separated themselves, and formed into a line, the extent of which the flashing of the lanterns which they carried plainly indicated.

At the ends this line now begun to curve slightly.

"We are being surrounded," said Turpin, as he observed this change in the position of the lights. "They will



[TURPIN AND KING ENTERING THE MANSION AT DURLEY CHINE.]

form round in a circle. There is no help for it. We must push forward!"

In a few minutes after this they emerged into a small open space.

It was not the extremity of the wood which they had reached, as they at first fancied, but one of those small open spaces covered with soft turf which are not unfrequent in forests of considerable extent.

"We must fight it out, Tom," said Dick. "I wish we had known, we would have begun before. Still, never mind! Cheer up!"

"I feel very weak and cold, my friend," said Tom, "though I think I am not quite so bad as I was a little while ago. Let me have another drink at the brandy. It is the real stuff."

"With all the pleasure in life. Finish it off! It's no good disguising the fact, we have hot and dangerous work before us."

"Look," said Tom, as he returned the flask, "there is a tree which has been cut down. Let us place our-

selves behind its branches. We shall be better prepared for resistance then."

"We shall. Quick! or we shall be intercepted!"

The two highwaymen made a sudden dash across the open space to where a large tree had been felled, and ensconced themselves among its branches.

It had not evidently been long in its present position, for the leaves were plentiful upon it, and green and fresh.

They took up this position only just in time, for seven or eight officers, uttering loud shouts to each other and cries to our friends to surrender, rushed into the enclosure.

If they had sought for honours in the forest, they could scarcely have found a better place for defending themselves from attack than the one they now occupied. The stout, straggling branches of the tree would be very puzzling obstacles to overcome, and very difficult ones where two desperate men were behind them, who had firmly resolved to die rather than yield.

Turpin and King drew their hangers, and placed themselves on guard.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE MYSTERY OF DUFFY CHINE.

BLACK BESS had followed with noiseless step and rapid agility in the footsteps of her master and his comrade.

Her fine perceptions seemed to make her conscious that silence was absolutely required, and she trod as stealthily as cat after its prey.

The posture of affairs in that little open space in the forest was rather singular in itself and most perilous for our friends.

At some not very distant period it would seem that one of those gigantic oaks, for the growth of which England is so famous, had—

“Reared its tall branches to the sky”

from the centre of this clearing, but now it had been felled preparatory to removal.

Its branches were many, wide spreading, and stout, and covered a large piece of ground as it thus lay upon one side, which, of course, had the natural effect of causing them to spread out laterally to a great distance, while in many places they rose vertically to a considerable height.

In all the forest it is questionable whether there could have been found a place more suitable for intrenchment, or a position where two men could better defend themselves against a host.

The capacity of this place was, of course, immediately perceived by Turpin, and he at once turned it to its greatest possible advantage.

The branches interlaced each other in a very puzzling manner, but the two friends penetrated them for some distance, leading Black Bess by the bridle.

Then, having reached a part sufficiently free from obstructions to allow of such a feat, they forced Bess to lie down upon her side.

But our friends were fully alive to the vital importance of their attitude of action, and all this was done with great rapidity, and before the officers could reach the tree.

In a moment afterwards, however, and before Turpin and King could look to the priming of their pistols, they were upon them.

“Stand firm!” said Dick to his comrade. “Stand firm! Remember this will be no child’s play! We are fighting for our liberty and life against four times our force—men who have determined to deprive us of one of them! Now, Tom! Here they are! Upon them!”

As he spoke, Turpin advanced a few paces.

He waited, though, for the police to commence the attack, who had completely surrounded the fallen tree and were crying in loud tones for the highwaymen to surrender.

But, finding not the slightest notice taken of their words, they fired an irregular volley into the tree.

This was done, of course, at random, for they had no idea whereabouts among the foliage their prey had concealed themselves, but they trusted one of the shots would find them out.

Not the faintest sound, however, came from the branches of the tree, so they fired again.

This volley was succeeded by a shot from the tree, and one of the officers placed his hands upon his breast and fell backwards.

There was one less for our friends to contend against.

The others, however, marked the spot from whence the flash and the smoke of the discharged pistol proceeded, and half-a-dozen shots were fired in that direction.

Our friends, though, had taken the precaution to crouch as low down on the ground as they could, so the bullets passed harmlessly a foot or two above their heads.

Another and another shot was fired by the highwaymen, both of which took effect upon the police, whose numbers were thus rapidly and unexpectedly reduced one-third.

“This will never do,” King and Turpin then heard a voice say. “We shall be picked off like sparrows on a fence.” Charge at once, and rout them from their cover.”

But the officers were but men, and had a wholesome dread of death, besides which, the fate of their companions was not without its effect upon them, and they

hung back a little from executing the order: of their chief.

They huddled together in a denser throng.

They were quickly made aware of the imprudence of this, for two more shots were fired from the tree.

“Charge! my men! charge!” again cried the officer in command. “The danger in doing so will be less than it is now. Upon them, then! Charge!”

As he spoke—for he was a brave man—he drew his own cutlass from its sheath and sprang forward.

The others could not do otherwise than follow his example.

In their progress, though, they were greeted with two other shots, with equally good effect as the preceding ones.

But they did not draw back a moment, or hesitate in the least.

The number of officers was now reduced to four, and all this while neither of the highwaymen had received any injury worth speaking of.

There is a little mystery in connexion with the pistol-shots which we have yet to reveal.

Crouching down low upon the ground, Tom King loaded the pistols, and handed them to Turpin; who, resting the barrels upon a limb of the old oak, was thus enabled to take a most careful and deadly aim.

The lanterns which the officers carried assisted him greatly in doing this.

He had reduced the number of his opponents to less than one-half.

It was very repugnant to Dick to pick the men off in this way, but he felt that unless he chose to allow himself and his companion to be taken prisoners, there was no help for it.

But the officers now, as we have said, charged boldly at the highwaymen.

It would have been much wiser on their parts if they had adopted this plan at first, but the peculiar place in which our friends had taken shelter baffled them.

But Dick and Tom felt from the vigor with which the officers now pressed forwards to attack them, that they would yet have to struggle desperately for their lives and liberty.

Therefore, after one more discharge, they both took up their hangers.

Dick felt a desire to whisper to King, and tell him to try his best, but he was afraid his voice would reach the ears of the police-officers, and make them aware of their exact hiding-place.

Instead of speaking, he simply pressed his comrade’s arm.

And then the officers were upon them.

But our friends had securely intrenched themselves behind some of the interlacing boughs of the tree, which formed a kind of barrier almost breast-high.

The officers had drawn their cutlasses.

They did not wait now to load and fire their pistols, but each wielded his weapon with an impetuosity which he hoped would quickly overcome the resistance offered to them.

But they were mistaken.

Turpin and King were both excellent swordsmen—it had been imperatively necessary that they should become proficient in every means of defence—and in a few moments two of the foremost officers fell beneath their strokes, while they themselves had received no further injury.

There was another circumstance, too, which we forgot to mention, and which gave the two friends no inconsiderable advantage.

It was this.

The ground upon which the tree had fallen, rose into a little hillock, and it was upon the summit of this elevation that Dick and Tom stood.

They were, consequently, at least two feet higher than the police, which enabled them to reach over the barrier of branches.

But the two remaining officers—one of whom was the chief—were very bold, determined men, and they resolved by their own efforts either to capture the highwaymen or die in the attempt.

They were warned up to a perfect pitch of frenzy.

Dick and Tom received their onslaught with coolness,

and calmly defended themselves while waiting their opportunity to deal them a slashing cut.

Turpin was the first to disable his antagonist, whom he wounded so severely in the shoulder that he was fain to sink upon the ground, and proclaim himself vanquished.

Then he turned towards Tom King, whom he knew, from the wounds he had received, must be nearly, if not quite, exhausted.

Dick found him engaged with the corner of the police, who had already forced his way through the umbrageous jarricade, and was pressing hardly upon him.

In fact, it was well for Tom that Turpin turned his attention to him when he did, for his foot slipped, and he fell heavily upon the ground.

He was so faint he could not rise, for he had, since the wound he received just before entering the forest, lost an enormous quantity of blood.

Before, however, the chief officer could follow up the advantage he had gained, he found himself suddenly confronted by Dick Turpin, who at once attacked him.

The chances between the two combatants were nearly equal—if anything, the chief of the police was the taller and more powerful man of the two.

Dick could not but admire the bravery of this officer, who, although he knew all hope of victory and capture was at an end, yet did not in the least abate the strength of his blows, or indicate the least idea of surrender.

On the contrary, he fought, if possible, with greater fury than before, and for once Turpin found some one who was fairly entitled to be called his match.

Still our hero did not like the idea of slaying this man, foe though he was, and he, therefore, sought to disarm him.

In this he was for a long time unsuccessful, for the officer, with loud cries for him to yield, attacked him with great resolution.

There was very little light, too, for them to fight by. The lanterns had become one by one extinct, and it was only because their eyes had got thoroughly accustomed to the darkness that they could see each other at all.

At length Dick, who was fairly weary of the fray, dealt one terrific sweeping blow with his hanger, which, striking through all guard, reached the head of the brave officer, who fell to the ground suddenly and heavily as though he had been knocked down with a pole-axe.

The highwaymen were masters of the field.

CHAPTER XLVII.

OUR TWO FRIENDS ENTER UPON A NEW LINE OF BUSINESS.

At the moment the officer fell to the ground, Tom King raised himself a little upon one hand and looked confusedly about him.

In fact, during Dick's contest with the chief of the police, he had lain in something that closely resembled a swoon.

For a minute or two he remained rather in doubt as to what had happened, and he passed his other hand over his eyes repeatedly.

But just as memory was flooding back upon him, the familiar tones of Dick's voice reached his ears.

"Tom—Tom," he heard him say, "the day is ours. Get up! get up at once! All is over now! I mean there is no danger! Our foes are all slain or wounded, and I myself am unhurt. Come, get up—get up!"

"All right," replied King, in what he intended to be a cheerful voice, but he found to his surprise that the words were almost inaudible.

He made a stronger effort.

"I am afraid I am badly hurt," he said, and he raised himself still further from the ground. "Help me up, Dick. I fancy when once I reach my feet I shall be able to stand all right enough."

But even as he uttered this assurance, so sudden an accession of weakness came over him, that he sank back upon the sword.

"Hilloa!" said Turpin, in some surprise, for until then he had no idea of the condition of his friend. "Hilloa, Tom! are you so bad as that? Eh?"

But no sound responded to his words, save a strange half sigh, half groan.

Seriously alarmed, Dick knelt down hastily by the side of his friend, and placed his hand upon his heart.

It was beating regularly but very feebly.

"Oh! it is not so bad, after all, as I thought it was," he said, while he gave vent to a sigh of relief. "Not so bad as I thought it, but if something is not done, and that quickly, it soon will be worse. Let me get my lantern out of his pocket, and then I shall be able to see what I am doing!"

The reader will recollect the lantern of which Dick now spoke. It was that one which had rendered them such signal service while escaping from the "Samson and Lion."

Turpin was not long finding and lighting it.

He first cast the broad, bright beam of light upon his friend's countenance.

It was very pale, and streaked with blood in many places.

Tom's eyes were closed, and he looked for all the world as though Death had written Finis to his career.

But such was not the case, nor was it to be until he had seen stranger and more perilous adventures than any with which he had yet met.

King opened his eyes.

It is most likely the bright rays of the lantern falling upon his eyelids aroused him.

But he could not see his friend, who held the lamp before him, and whose form was consequently shrouded in darkness.

He heard his voice, though, for Dick, as soon as he saw Tom's eyes open, spoke to him cheerily.

Then the administration of some more brandy from the flask greatly aided his recovery; in fact, in a few moments he was able to sit up.

With all imaginable tenderness Turpin made an examination of the wounds which Tom King had received.

He was overjoyed to find them all of a superficial character—the first one he had received looked the worst, but that was owing in a great measure to the coagulated blood about it, which had forced itself through the bandage he had so hastily tied on.

"You will be right enough in a very short time," he said, as King looked inquiringly at him. "Absolute rest for a time will be indispensable, and then you will be as sound as ever you were."

"I am glad of that assurance, my friend, for I do assure you I feel about as bad as I well could just at present."

"No doubt—no doubt! Congratulate yourself that you have got off so well as you have."

"I do—and you?"

"I am, as I may say, perfectly unhurt, though I expect to find a scratch here and there. However, stay where you are for a moment. I would like down if I were you—it will rest you more, and you will recover your strength better. In the meantime I will try if I cannot find some water that will do to wash your hurts with. You will find a plentiful application of cold water will make a wonderful difference to you."

"I should be glad of some water, indeed!" replied King, "for the wounds smart and burn unbearably."

"That is inflammation—a thing to be especially eschewed—and you may make up your mind that if the hurts are not well cooled with water, they will take a dangerous turn. I shall not be long gone to fetch some, so be patient. I will just put Bess upon her legs again."

So saying, Turpin made a few steps further among the branches and helped his mare to her feet, for he had at the commencement of the contest commanded her to lie down, and so she had remained.

It was one of the things he had been most careful in teaching her, for he was well aware of the value it would be to him. In the present instance she had by lying down been entirely out of the range of the pistol shots.

When she reached her feet she rubbed her nose affectionately against Dick's breast, who in return patted her upon the neck.

Then, after a word more to King, Turpin left the tree which had been of such essential service to him, and crossed the little open space.

Bess followed him with the docility of a dog.

He listened for a long time for the sound of flowing water without result, but presently there came to his ears—

"—the bubbling music of some little stream
haviour over rocks."

He quickened his steps, and soon found himself upon the margin of one of those little brooks, which sometimes divide estates and counties from each other. He noted the spot carefully, and then retraced his steps.

King he found was already wonderfully better.

With his assistance Tom rose to his feet.

"Lay hold of my arm," said Dick. "Don't be afraid of leaning on me. I can bear your weight well enough. Or would you prefer mounting Bess?"

"I would rather walk," replied Tom. "I find I am gaining strength momentarily, and we have not far to go, have we?"

"Not a hundred and fifty yards."

"I can manage that then, especially if we walk slowly."

"To be sure you can. Come along, Bess!"

It took them some minutes to reach the little brook, and, when they did, Tom was fain to sit down upon the bank, which happened to be rather precipitous. The exertion of walking even that short distance completely exhausted him.

When he had rested a little, he, by Turpin's directions, got still closer to the water's edge, and put his arm so that the water actually flowed over it.

Dick then, by filling his hat with the pure fluid, poured a considerable quantity upon the upper part of his arm, near the shoulder.

The beneficial results of this treatment were soon apparent, and when the clotted blood was completely washed away from the wound, it did not look half so ghastly and formidable as it did before.

When this operation was completed, and the arm had been thoroughly drenched with the cold water—which, of course, had the very natural effect of staunching the blood to some degree—Turpin formed a portion of his clothing into a long bandage, which he first soaked thoroughly in the stream, and then bound tightly around Tom's arm.

"I think the worst part of the job is over," he said, as he rose from the crouching posture he had assumed. "How do you feel now?"

"Quite well!"

"I suppose you mean quite well to what you did a little while ago?"

"That's it! And I fancy now if you will only bathe my head and neck in the same way, I shall be as right as right can be."

"Very good! Hold your head over carefully."

Tom did so, and the copious stream which Dick poured upon it allayed instantly the smarting of one or two slight wounds which were in themselves nothing.

After the application of the cold water had been continued for about five minutes, Tom King felt himself well and strong enough to rise and walk without assistance.

Turpin observed this with pleasure, but he said:

"You must not tax your newly-gained strength too much, or you will suffer in the long run. I consider it imperatively necessary that we should seek a shelter somewhere. I mean a place where we can, if we choose, remain for a day or two without molestation."

"I do not know where such a place is to be found," said King, "though I should be glad enough were it discovered. If I could rest for a day or so, it would be a good thing for me, for in that time I should quite get over the effects of this night's work."

"We must try, though of course just now it will be more difficult than usual, for our fight with the officers will rouse all the county."

"It will, indeed! I did not think of that when I spoke. Why, the difficulty is ten times increased."

"It is! We left London because we made it too hot to hold us, but I fancy what we have done will make this place hotter still."

"You may depend upon it it will! It is unlucky for me—very. Still we can only make the best of it. Is it, though, really possible that we have overcome so large and well-armed a body of officers? I can scarcely credit it."

"Unfortunately for us, and for them also, it is too true! However, I did but defend myself."

"And your wounded comrade."

"I think you did a fair share towards defending yourself. More than most men would have been able to do with such hurts as you had received."

"But now," said Tom, as they both reached the little clearing again, "let us go back to our original consideration. What is to be done?"

"I have no idea further than that we push on as fast as possible."

"Yes, I am quite sure the greater distance we put between ourselves and this place the safer it will be for us. Have you any idea of the time?"

"The night must be young yet. However, we will consult the captain's watch."

"Oh! he was a captain, was he? Did you get anything like a booty?"

"Pretty fair," said Turpin.

He smiled as he took the lantern from his capacious pocket, and directed its light upon the face of the chronometer. It was just half-past ten.

"There is plenty of time for a great deal to be done before daybreak," remarked King.

"True!" said Turpin, returning the articles to his pocket; "and now the next thing you will have to do will be to mount."

"On Black Bess?"

"Yes."

"And what shall you do?"

"Walk, of course! Both of us cannot be on her back at once very well, and surely you would not have me ride, while you, wounded, walk on foot? Come, get up without any nonsense! You will find you will not be able to go on at any great rate for two or three reasons, so I shall be easily enough able to keep up with you."

"But—"

"I tell you, Tom, I will have no buts in the case, so mount at once. You must be aware that every moment may be of the utmost importance to us."

Finding it utterly useless to remonstrate, King suffered Dick to assist him on to Bess's back, who, in her way, seemed rather at a loss to account for the change which was made.

Tom seated himself in the saddle. He was beginning to find he was not so strong as he fancied he was.

"There is one thing more to be considered before we start," he said, as Dick took hold of Bess's bridle to lead her away.

"What is that?"

"Simply this. If you have not lost all count of our course, I have, and I should just like to know which is north, east, south, and west. We ought to be going south."

"I confess," said Turpin, "I had lost my reckoning, and was about to lead you off without considering the way. However, I am very glad you mentioned it, because we shall easily settle the point."

"How?"

"With the captain's watch."

"The captain's watch?"

"Yes; I have noticed that many watches made for seafaring people have a compass fitted in the back, and I daresay this one has."

"It will be capital if it has."

"We shall soon know," said Dick, as he once more produced his invaluable lantern, and looked at the watch by means of its rays. "Here you are, just as I expected."

The highwayman then placed the watch in a horizontal position, and found that the south was just before them, so that Dick had by chance hit upon the right direction.

But now, feeling themselves quite sure upon the point, Turpin took hold of Bess's bridle again, and pushed onwards at a good speed.

Just then the clouds parted a little, and allowed the moon to take a peep at their proceedings.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SUCCESSION OF STRANGE EVENTS—DICK TURPIN RELATES HIS EARLY HISTORY TO HIS FRIEND, TOM KING. DOWN many a glade—through many a thicket—over many a stream and treacherous morass—sometimes lighted by the straggling moonbeams, and sometimes in the profoundest darkness—our two friends made their way. Dick Turpin had hold of his mare's bridle, professing to lead her, but although he did shape her course, he trusted entirely to her finer instinct to keep out of any dangerous places.

As for Tom, he sat very quietly upon the back of Black

ness, he was more prostrated from the effect of his wounds than he cared to acknowledge, even to himself.

From time to time, as they proceeded on their way, Dick had recourse to the compass in the captain's watch, in order to make sure they were not travelling in the wrong direction.

It was obviously their best policy to get as far from London—or, in fact, any town—as possible, and then to conceal for a little time until the time their last exploits would be sure to make should, in some measure, have died away.

Both were well aware that if they persevered in the course they were taking, they must reach the sea coast at some point between Southampton and Portsmouth.

They continued, therefore, to do so a passage in this direction, for they argued that if it should become imperative, they would no doubt be able to slip over to France for a time.

It was not until they had gone many a mile, apparently where no man had gone for a hundred years at least, that Tom spoke.

"Dick—Dick," he said.

His voice was low but firm.

"What is it, my friend? Are you better?"

"Much! But when you again look at the compass to make certain of our route, turn the watch over on the other side and tell me what the time is."

"I will do that now, for I was about to look when you spoke. It wants a little more than half an hour of midnight."

"Indeed, so late! Surely, now, in half an hour we shall emerge from this place, of which I am most heartily tired, and we shall be able to tell whereabouts we are."

"I suppose the necessity of rest grows upon you."

"No, I cannot say that is altogether it; but I feel impatient, and long to place myself where I shall be more secure than I am now, for I can assure you I could now do very little in the fighting way."

"I should think not; so, for your sake, I hope we shall meet with no interruption."

It was turning closely upon midnight when the two friends emerged from the forest.

A scene of surpassing beauty met their gaze.

Before them, glistening in the moonbeams like polished silver, was the English Channel. It stretched to the right, to the left, and straight on before them, as far as the eye could reach.

The landscape, too, was very rich, and very thickly wooded.

There was but one habitation in sight, and that was a very fine old Gothic hall, or mansion, which was built upon the summit of a rock, and overlooking the sea.

It was surrounded by a park of vast extent, which had rather a sombre appearance, attributable, however, to the great number of chestnut-trees that grew in it.

The moon was barely half way between the horizon and the zenith, but she had risen above the thick bank of clouds, and her bright rays fell upon the roofs and chimneys and one side of this mansion with an exceedingly beautiful effect.

For some time the two highwaymen remained quite motionless, gazing upon the magnificent panorama spread out before them, in which, at that still hour, the longer they gazed the more beauties they found.

Dick was the first to break the silence.

"This is splendid!" he said; "I never saw anything one half so lovely. Did you, Tom?"

"I must confess I never have," said King, "and yet this place is most deceitful."

"Deceitful, Tom? Why, what do you mean? Do you mean to tell me it will fade away—vanish—like that, what do you call it the travellers say they see in the desert?"

"The mirage! No, that is not what I meant. Do you see the mansion up there?"

"Yes."

"I have heard of it many times, and recognise it from the descriptions I have at various times had of it, and sketches I have seen. You, doubtless, when I mention it, will know its name. Or, at all events, have heard it before."

"What is it, then? You fill me with curiosity."

He drew closer to King as he spoke.

"It is known," said Tom, "by the rather singular name of Durlley Chine."

"Durlley Chine?"

"Yes. Is it possible you have not hitherto heard the name?"

"I have no remembrance of it."

"You surprise me! A few years ago there was a great talk about it. However it turns out an excellent thing for us."

"You talk rather enigmatically, Tom, and you jump from one thing to another strangely. What is it you mean? You spoke at first about this beautiful prospect being deceitful. Now, I should like to know first what you meant by that."

"I will tell you."

Dick looked with increasing earnestness into his companion's face.

He anticipated some remarkable and interesting revelation.

"When I spoke of its being deceitful," continued King, "I alluded chiefly to the air of peaceful serenity there is about this place, and thought of the strange occurrences that happened some twelve or fourteen years ago, when I was a boy."

"Indeed! What were they?"

"It will be scarcely worth while to tell you now," said Tom, "nor would it be wise. We shall soon have a more fitting opportunity. I intend we shall take up our abode in that mansion for a time! No one will think of looking for us there."

"And how about the residents?"

"The place is uninhabited, and has been for the period of time I mentioned."

"Fourteen or fifteen years?"

"Yes."

"How extraordinary! Whatever can be the reason that such a magnificent property as this is deserted?"

"That forms the sequel to the account I have to give you of the things that happened there. It was one of those domestic tragedies, the remembrance of which endures for a generation, and is then forgotten."

"You have filled me with curiosity and interest."

"I do not doubt that; but come, do not stay here like this; let us push forward. In a very short time now we shall be secure from all search; and I shall, besides, be able to have that rest which I feel is so vitally important to me."

"I am glad to hear that. But the place of concealment had need to be a good one, if we are to escape discovery. There will be a hot search made."

"You are right there, but I am not much afraid now. Take the bride again, and keep on in as straight a line as you can."

Once more then the little party set themselves in motion.

The road they took, which was nothing more than a footpath through some fields, was somewhat devious, so that in a little while they lost sight of the sea, but the gabled roofs of Durlley Chine, owing to their elevation above the surrounding scenery, were still visible.

A little more than a quarter of an hour's walk brought them to a broad cross-country lane.

Turpin unfastened the gate, and passed out of the field into it.

The opposite side of the lane was formed of wooden palings, some six feet in height.

They were nailed close together—one strip of wood overlapping the other.

A green, mossy parasite had overgrown this palisade, and imparted to it a neglected appearance, while here and there some trailing plant had twined itself fantastically about it.

Above this paling, and effectually preventing any one from surmounting it or even seeing what was on the other side, grew a large quickset hedge, which was in the full glory of unrestricted growth.

Above that could be seen the tops of numerous large chestnut-trees.

"This, I take it," said King, after Turpin had re-fastened the gate, "is the boundary paling of Durlley Park. How gloomy it looks!"

"And how impenetrable. How are you going to effect an entrance?"

"Why, not by climbing over that hedge, you may be sure. If we follow the palisade we must arrive at the entrance gates."

"Yes; but do you think of getting through them?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! I see no reason why not."

"Of course, if we find a gap in the palings we may as well pass through it. But I do not suppose we shall."

"Not see a gap in the palings, and the place been so long deserted?—should think we shall be sure to do so."

"You will know more presently."

"You are very mysterious about it."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure."

"Well, I will tell you how it is. I said just now I was acquainted with some particulars of certain events that happened here and led to its being closed up. I want to give you those particulars in the form of a narrative, unspoilt by my telling you anything you might construe into a solution of the mystery."

"Then I only hope it will prove interesting enough to compensate me for my patience in waiting for it."

"I can promise that it will beforehand; and look, do you see the top of some white object just in advance?"

"Quite plainly. I was just going to ask you if you knew what it was. It looks like some monument or other, but it cannot be that, surely?"

"I have never seen it, but only heard that it is here to be seen by anyone who takes the trouble to look."

"What is there to be seen?"

Tom laughed as he replied—

"You must wait and see."

The lane curved round a good deal to the left, so that, although the moon's rays, which became every moment more brilliant, showed the top of some monument, the lower part was not to be seen.

That part which was visible resembled the apex of an obelisk.

Dick's curiosity, which was now raised to the highest pitch of endurance, was soon gratified, for in a few moments they went round the bend in the lane, which then for a mile at least stretched out in a straight line before them.

Near the middle of this straight piece of roadway—that is to say, rather less than half a mile distant was that which the highwayman had seen the top of over the trees.

It was clearly a monument of some kind, though it seemed a very strange place for such a thing to be erected.

In a very few minutes Turpin and King reached it, and by mutual consent both stopped to examine it attentively.

The strange and startling events that are about to be related in connection with the old mansion at Durlley Chine, make it imperative that we should be a little more precise than usual in describing it.

Its height from the ground to the point at the top was not much under twenty feet, so that, placed as it was in the centre of the lane, it formed a very conspicuous object.

It was built entirely of white marble, very highly polished, and the moonbeams fell upon it with rare beauty and effect.

The base of this monument consisted of a square pedestal about five feet in height by three across.

Upon the top of this pedestal (one at each corner and the other in the centre) were placed five stone balls, resembling cannon balls in every respect save colour.

These formed a support for the upper part of the monument, which was composed of a pyramidally-shaped block of marble, at least ten feet in height.

Such was the peculiar object before which the two friends paused.

The singularity of its shape was sufficient in itself to attract, under any circumstances, something more than a passing observation, but its strange situation made it still more remarkable.

The highwaymen looked upon it for some moments in silence.

Tom King was determined not to be the first to speak. He had not to wait long, for Turpin asked—

"Has any one been buried here?—what is it?"

"Look a little closer at the pedestal, my friend, you will see that there is upon it an inscription."

"No, there isn't; it is a coat of arms, or something of that sort."

"And is there nothing more—no lines under it?"

"No."

"You must be making a mistake, or else I have been informed wrongly."

"Oh! I see," said Dick, who had made a re-examination of the pillar, "I see how it is! There is a coat of arms on two sides of the pedestal, and an inscription on the others."

"I thought so. I had always been told there was. Can you read what it is?"

"On this side I can, for the letters are large and deeply cut."

"That will do, then. The inscription on the other side is merely a duplicate of this one."

"Listen."

Dick then read as follows.

We give the inscription just as it appeared upon the stone.

In obedience to the instructions

Contained in the last Will and Testament of

SIR ERNEST DANE, Kt.,

This Marble Monument has been in this place erected by his Executors,

In order to make known to all persons that the Will of the deceased Baronet strictly enjoins

that,

Dating from the time of his funeral,

The 25th JULY, MDCCXVII.,

No foot be placed

Either within the mansion of Durlley Chine

or the park surrounding it

For the period of One Hundred Years;

But all things left

Untouched as they were at his death.

And

Should any one be found sufficiently abandoned to

disregard the last injunctions of the dead

(which should always be held sacred),

They will in the eyes of the law be guilty of a trespass,

for which

They will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour,

Sir Ernest having caused to be set aside

A sum of money

For that especial purpose.

"What do you think of that, Dick?" asked Tom King, when his companion had finished reading the above inscription.

"What do I think of it? Why, that altogether it is the most extraordinary thing I have ever met with."

"I don't doubt that."

"What in the world could be his motive for abandoning such a beautiful residence to decay?"

"You may depend it was an all-powerful one."

"Do you know what it was?"

"Rumour has given several reasons," replied Tom, evasively. "When this monument was first put up it called forth a great deal of remark."

"It would be sure to do that. And these armorial bearings on the other side are, I presume, those belonging to the family of the baronet?"

"Yes."

"How strange, to be sure! And I see now, as you pass down the lane either way, the inscription is before you."

"Just so. That was in order every one should see it."

"I wonder if his wishes have been scrupulously observed."

"I cannot tell, my friend. I can only say this, if they have hitherto they won't be much longer!"

"Then, do you think of taking refuge in the mansion?"

"I do. I resolved upon it the moment I saw the building."

"Now, I should have thought," said Dick, half seriously, "that from what you said about the miser's box, you would have had too great a reverence for the wishes of the dead to disobey them."

"So I should, if they had been at all reasonable. But when they are ridiculously absurd, like these, I consider I am quite justified."

"And so do I. For I tell you plainly it is not because this place will afford us such complete concealment that I am anxious to enter it, but I have made up my mind to see if I cannot find out the reason why Sir Ernest made so peculiar a will."

"With all my heart, do it," said Tom.

"I think I never had my curiosity so much excited about anything as it has been about this."

"It looks like it. However, I have heard an account of the mystery of Durley Chine, but how far it is truth, and how far fiction, I cannot tell until we have actually seen the inside of the place."

"Come along, then, at once! But you speak a great deal better than you did."

"Oh! yes, I am much stronger now than I was. Yours was very judicious treatment, Dick."

"It was simple, and it appears to have been effective."

"It has. I shall soon be all right again, thanks to you. And now we ought not to lose any more time than we have already. Let us see about making an entrance into Durley Chine."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SECRET OF DURLEY CHINE.

OUR friends now, having given one more glance at the obelisk, turned round.

Then, and not till then, did they notice that they had reached the termination of the park paling, and that there was in its place the entrance gates to the park.

They were flanked by very large solid stone buttresses. The hinges of the gates, which were of wrought-iron, were secured in two high stone pillars, which had upon their tops the crest of the family sculptured in stone.

This was a lion seated, with one of his fore-paws resting upon a vertical shield.

"I don't think we shall have much difficulty over this job," said Turpin, who carefully examined the lock. "It is large and formidable-looking, but it will be all the easier picked for that!"

"It will; but are there no other fastenings?"

"None that I can see, with the exception of two bolts."

"Oh! they are nothing. But, Dick."

"What?"

"You must be careful how you open the gate. You must do it so as to be able to fasten it again, and leave it without the appearance of its having been tampered with. If you do not, you will destroy our safe hiding-place at once."

"I'll take care of that. You watch for anyone coming."

"All right! There is not much to fear, though, I fancy, in the way of an interruption. Still it is best to be prepared."

In the meantime, Turpin had produced a pick-lock from his pocket, with which he immediately commenced operations.

The gate lock baffled him for some time.

At last, however, its bolt shot back with a sharp click. It was then an easy matter to withdraw the bolts, and swinging one half of the gate open, Turpin entered, closely followed by Tom King, who was mounted on Black Bess.

As soon as they had passed through, Dick shut the gate, bolted it, and then, by the aid of the little instrument which had already been so useful, relocked it.

They were now standing in the main avenue of Durley Chine, or rather in what once was the main avenue.

Now it presented no claim for such a designation, for the fine gravel was completely overgrown by a mass of luxuriant undergrowth, through which they had some trouble in forcing a way.

It grew darker and darker at every step they took.

The huge horse-chestnut trees with which the park was literally filled, stretched out their massive branches, loaded with dark leaves, in every possible direction, and making too dense a canopy overhead for the moon's rays to penetrate.

A row of these sombre-looking trees had been planted at each side of the avenue, and doubtless, when properly trimmed, looked handsome enough; but now, for more than fifteen years, they had been allowed to grow unrestrainedly, so that they had put forth branches here and there, until the whole were inextricably interwoven with each other.

Our friends' progress was necessarily slow, for they felt it incumbent upon them to proceed with caution.

It was one comfort, though, to find the ground beneath their feet firm and even.

The avenue was serpentine in shape, so that they could not obtain a glimpse even of its termination, nor of the mansion they were so anxious to reach.

Dick's thoughts were running upon the mysterious monument.

"Did this Sir Ernest Dane," he said, after a few minutes silence, "have no heirs?"

"None very closely allied to him, but several distant relatives."

"And did they not contest this will?"

"I believe they did all that could be done to set it aside, but their attempts failed utterly. The baronet was one too many for them."

"How very strange! But stop! What is to become of the place at the end of the hundred years?"

"It is to go into the possession of his nearest heir then living. You must understand that this estate is, or was, but a portion of his property. The remainder he divided pretty equally among his descendants."

"Then they ought to have been satisfied, and have left him to the quiet indulgence of his whim."

"I don't know that. It was argued that no man had a right to do as he had done, and I think it was argued very justly."

"Perhaps so, for a multitude of evils might spring from such a state of things."

"You are right enough there, but you see here the place remains as he ordered it, though whether it will remain until 1817 is more than I can tell."

"Or care to know. Thank goodness!" exclaimed Turpin; "we have reached the end of this avenue at last."

It was as Turpin had said; they had reached the end of the avenue, but before they gained the mansion they would have to cross a lawn of unusual size, on which the grass had grown to a height of three or four feet.

Before them, however, was the picturesque residence called Durley Chine.

They were facing, of course, the front of the house.

It was in deep shadow, for the moon was hidden behind; still her rays served to outline it with great distinctness.

Our friends made a strange, rustling sound, as they crossed this neglected lawn.

"What a very pretty place this is, Tom," said Turpin. "Really, the more one sees of it the greater seems the shame that it should be left to rot away."

"And yet, Dick, you ought to recollect that our recent adventures will be the means of bringing us into great peril; so you see Sir Ernest's whim has done some service to us, at least, for you may depend, if we only act with moderate caution, we shall be able to stay here unmolested as long as we think proper."

"Perhaps so."

"There is no perhaps in the matter; for, unless they had conclusive evidence that we were hiding here, I am certain neither officers nor anyone else would be permitted to search here. I very much question even if they would be allowed were they quite certain."

"This, then, we may say, is a sanctuary?"

"Exactly."

"And that all they could do, if they found we were here, would be to starve us out."

"They could do that, certainly."

"But come, never mind that now. Here we are."

"Yes, my friend; but, before we try to make an entrance, had we not better house Bess somewhere?"

"I don't know; I fancy it will be the best to take her round either to the side or the rear, and tether her to a tree, so that she can feed upon the grass, for we have no other food to offer her."

"Be it so, then. But you must take care not to place her where she can be seen by any one overlooking the place."

"Oh! yes, that will be managed easily enough."

Bess, accordingly, was led round to the back of the mansion; and our friends having found a kind of shrubbery, they tied her by the reins to one of the trees near it, leaving her sufficient length to crop the rather rank herbage about her feet.

Dick was also careful not to actually secure her to the tree, for he knew his mare was sagacious enough to understand she was not to stray from where she had been placed; at the same time, should anything occur to make

such a thing necessary, she could release herself from her bondage.

This having been done, King and Turpin once more made their way round to the front of the mansion.

The hall-door was reached by two flights of stone steps, each of which had a massive balustrade.

Two lions, chiselled in stone, similar to those upon the park-gates, but much smaller in size, were upon the end of the balustrades.

Decay, however, had already begun to exert its influence upon both balustrade and steps; for the former were crumbling at the edges, and moss-grown, while the latter were broken in many places.

Day by day, year by year, had dust accumulated in the crevices of the stonework, and then the seeds of many curious wild plants had drifted there, and grown up, but, from want of space to take proper root, dwarfed in their proportions.

In fact, when the two highwaymen ascended the flight of steps, and stood upon the huge slab in front of the hall-door, the traces of desolation and neglect became more and more apparent.

The massive doorway itself was a perfect marvel in the shape of grotesque carving, but the finer portions of it had long since crumbled into powder.

The door was large, and of solid oak. Its colour now, however, was difficult to determine.

It was gracefully ornamented, and, at the same time, strengthened by a quantity of filagree ironwork running over it.

There were shutters to all the windows, but they were closed. They were of a kind very rarely to be met with now. In shape they more than anything else resembled the modern venetian blind, except that they were large and strong, and were hung on the outside with perpendicular hinges.

It was quite clear that to whomsoever the eccentric baronet had delegated the carrying out of his instructions had done their duty, for the place was strongly barricaded.

Turpin took hold of the large knob upon the door, and tried to shake it.

He might as well have tried to shake the great door of Newgate itself.

It was as firm as a rock.

"It strikes me, Tom," he said, "that this place may be, after all, just a little bit too secure."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, that we shall not be able to get in."

"Do you think not?"

"I fancy we shall have considerable trouble. Just put your shoulder against this door, and try to shake it!"

"Not I! It is quite immovable, no doubt."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"We must seek some weak part of the defences to make an entrance."

"And where do you imagine you will find it? It appears to me the place has been fastened up with the greatest possible care."

"It has, unquestionably, but they have left one point unguarded."

"Where?"

"These little windows!"

Tom King, as he spoke, pointed to two small latticed casements.

They were placed upon each side of the door, and probably for the purpose of illuminating the hall.

They were tall, and comparatively narrow.

They were filled with a great number of minute stained glass, diamond-shaped panes.

But they were unprovided with shutters.

The little side windows had, evidently, either been entirely overlooked, or else, finding there was no means of fastening them, they had been left to take their chance.

When Tom King called Turpin's attention to them, both became aware that a soft light had stolen over the scene, and that they could see now with much greater distinctness what they were about than they could before.

They turned round to see from whence this sudden accession of light had come, and found that the moon had just made her way round to the front of the mansion, and was shining softly upon them.

Dick took from the pocket in his coat, which he had made expressly for it, a small steel crowbar.

"This will facilitate operations, I rather think. It is a beautiful little weapon, is it not?"

He held it out to Tom as he spoke.

King took it in his hands, and, just glancing at it for a moment, said—

"It will be of most essential service. But we have wasted sadly too much time already. So, here goes!"

He made a step forward to the little window.

"Nay, nay," said Dick, "you are wounded, my friend, although you must be getting much better, or you would not have needed me to remind you of it. Still, I fancy I can do it better than you."

"I had forgotten it for the moment, I confess. But take the jemmy, and start at once!"

"All right!" said Dick. "It will be easy enough to get in now."

But he found much more difficulty in effecting an entrance than he at all expected.

CHAPTER L.

RELATES THE STRANGE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS WHICH THE HIGHWAYMEN SAW AND HEARD IN THE DESERTED MANSION AT DURLEY CHINE.

HOLDING the little crowbar firmly in his hand, and mounting upon a portion of the stonework, Dick Turpin made an examination of the fastenings of the tall, narrow windows.

He quickly found they were very simple, so he broke one of the little panes and introduced his hand.

Simply turning round a button handle undid the casement, and he flung it open at once.

Then he, for the first time, became cognizant of the fact that the hall window was protected on the inner side by some ornamental iron-work.

He communicated his discovery to Tom King, who remarked—

"That is very awkward, but we ought to have foreseen it. You must break it down, but be careful to do so, if possible, in such a manner as not to excite notice—I can, in the event of any one coming here to look for us."

"I shall have some trouble in doing that. However, I will do my best."

A grating, crackling sound now ensued, which showed that Turpin had already done some execution.

"Does it yield easily?" asked Tom.

"Oh! yes. I suppose the damp has got to it in some way, for it hardly holds a bit in the setting. That's the last one! There it goes!"

The iron screen which Turpin had displaced bodily fell with a loud clang upon the flooring of the hall, raising a thousand and a thousand echoes in the dismal building.

All within was as dark as the very tomb.

Turpin leaped down again on to the stone slab.

"Now, Tom, my friend," he said, "enter! The way is clear before you! I will follow!"

So saying, he caught hold of his comrade and assisted him on to the piece of stone coping from whence he could without difficulty make his way through the window into the hall.

Tom King got quite through the window, but did not jump down.

He seated himself upon the inner sill, and, turning round, said—

"Light that lantern of yours, Dick, and hand it up here. It is positively so dark that I could not see anything within an inch of my nose. And before I shift from where I am I should like to see where I am going to."

"You are wise. Stop a moment."

Once again, on that memorable night, did Dick produce his lantern, which had been of such good service to them, and, having ignited it, gave it to his friend who stretched out his hand to receive it.

Tom King then cast the broad ray of light full into the interior of the hall.

Its vastness, both in respect to length, height, and width, was something wonderful. A carriage and pair could have been turned round in it with ease.

But Tom King did not attempt to make any particular examination of the hall while in his present position; he merely noticed the distance to the floor, and, finding it insignificant, dropped it at once.



[DICK TURPIN RELATING HIS EARLY HISTORY TO TOM KING.]

In another moment Turpin had scrambled through the window and was standing at his side.

King stooped down and picked up the iron screw from the floor of the hall.

"Take this, Dick," he said, "and before we do anything further, or look at anything, let us restore the window to the same state as it was when we first saw it."

"It is a good advice, and I will follow it. First, however, I will close and refasten the window."

"Good; but you must see to do it by the aid of such light as comes to you from without."

"Why not turn the lantern this way?"

"It would be most unwise to do so. We do not know but even at this moment some person may have his eyes fixed upon this building, and whose suspicions would be immediately excited if he saw a light flash from one of the windows."

"You are quite right, Tom, and I admire your caution," said Turpin, as he forced the fastening of the window into its place. "Hand me the piece of iron, and I will fix it up again."

This was the most troublesome job of all; but at length, after repeated efforts, Turpin succeeded in replacing it.

To be sure, the least touch would have knocked it down again, but they did not expect any one would be there to touch it, so they considered they had done pretty well.

The pane of glass which Dick had broken would, of course, have to remain as it was; but, even in the event of any one coming to that door, such a little thing as that might elude their observation.

When Dick stood on the hall-floor again, he took the lantern from Tom's hand, and looked all about him by its aid.

From the very first he had felt a deep curiosity about this so strangely deserted mansion.

He turned the beam of light first upon one wall. For about half-way they were composed of black oaken panelling, very richly and grotesquely carved.

The figures upon them seemed to be in some way connected with each other, as though the whole formed an allegorical or emblematical device which Dick fancied

pertained to the chase, but he did not pause to examine it with sufficient attention to say whether it was or not.

Between the top of the panelling and the ceiling were some large paintings—at least, such, from the frames, they imagined them to be; but they were so thickly encrusted with dust it was quite impossible to make anything out respecting them.

Several large doors opened from this entrance-hall in both sides of the wall, and in its centre almost was a spacious staircase, with a balustrade harmonizing with the panels.

On the first landing of the staircase they could dimly see a handsome window of stained glass.

From the roof of the hall depended a chandelier, in which were many pieces of wax candle.

Pieces of sculpture of various kinds were placed in the hall, as well as a huge ornamental flower or tree-pot, in which a withered, ghostly-looking stem still remained to show what had once been there.

But upon every object lay dust in surprising quantities. The floor of the hall was so thickly covered with it that the highwaymen's feet sunk into it like snow.

Such was the general appearance of the place into which our two friends intruded.

Can we wonder that, finding some fresh wonder at every turn, they stood for some time motionless and speechless.

At last when they had, bit by bit, seen the whole of the hall, Dick spoke.

He could not tell how it was, but somehow he involuntarily spoke in a subdued voice to his companion.

"What do you think of all this, Tom, my friend?" he said. "Is it not strangely and wonderfully solemn? What a pity, too, to see a place, like this must have been at one time, in such a state. It is shameful!"

"You are right there! But we have not, I fancy, seen one half of the wonders of Durlay Chine, and, doubtless, the remainder will well pay us for our trouble."

"If it is at all like this it will. But come, where shall we go first?"

"I should advise," said Tom, "that we make our way into some one of the apartments, and there make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances will allow."

"But the peep at the rest of the building, which I am so anxious to have?"

"It will, I fancy, be wisest to postpone that until to-morrow when we have daylight to aid us."

"Oh! we can do without daylight," said Dick. "This lantern will answer the purpose. Come along!"

"I can make every allowance for your curiosity and impatience, but I must really remind you of two things."

"What are they?"

"Why, firstly, that though I have held up very well considering, yet it has cost me an effort, for my wound is still painful, and I am yet weak."

"Pardon me, my friend, but I had forgotten that. We will find some place where we can rest at once."

"And not only that," continued King. "You must not forget that we shall only be safe here so long as we raise no suspicions of the place being inhabited. Now, it appears to me an impossibility for you to walk about the house with a light without its being seen at some of the windows, and then, of course, we should be done for at once."

"You are thoughtful and prudent," said Turpin. "It would be almost, if not quite, impossible not to show some light at the windows."

"Very well! Then I propose, as I said, that we make ourselves as comfortable as we can in one of the rooms. What do you say to this one?"

While he was speaking, Tom stepped across the hall, and put his hand upon the handle of one of the doors we have mentioned as opening out of it.

"Oh! let it be that one by all means," said Dick; "does it open?"

Tom turned the knob, and tried the door.

It was fast.

"If we get in here," he said, "we shall have to undo the lock. Can you manage that, Dick?"

"I dare say I can," said Turpin; "just hold the light for a minute or two, while I try."

Tom King took the light, as he was requested, while Turpin produced a small bunch of skeleton keys.

After trying several, he found one that would unlock the door.

It was very hard to turn, but it all at once shot back with a sudden snap that in that deathly, silent place, was positively startling.

Dick threw open the door, and paused for a moment on the threshold, so that whatever foul air that had accumulated there should be displaced.

Then both entered.

"Shield the lantern a little, Dick," said Tom, who had returned it to Turpin while they paused at the door. "Darken it for a moment, while I see whether there are shutters to this window, and whether they are closed."

The slide of the lantern was turned, so that only a fine pencil of light was allowed to pass through the lens.

The room was pitchy dark.

In a little while, though, they could distinguish from the rest of the gloom a few faint lines of light.

"We were right to take the precaution of dousing the light, Tom. Do you see? The night light is just visible there."

"It is. Do you recollect the peculiar shutters?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is through them that the light comes."

"That's it."

"We must stop them somehow from the inside, for, of course, if we can see the light from without, it is only fair to infer that our light will be seen from within."

"Of course. But how shall you stop up the window?"

"That remains to be seen. Throw the light just before our feet, so that we can see where we are going."

The room was of tolerable dimensions, for they were some time in reaching the window.

The floor of it was, if anything, more thickly covered with dust than the hall was, as seemed to be different and of a lighter character, for clouds of it arose at every step they took.

"Now," said King, as they paused before the window, "if there are only some inside shutters we shall be able to shut out the light without difficulty. Are there any?"

"No, none," said Turpin, after a minute's examination; "but there are apparently some very thick curtains, and I should think, if we draw them closely and carefully, they would answer the purpose quite as well."

"Almost; but not quite. However, draw them, and let us see."

But when Dick caught hold of the curtain and gave it a jerk, there fell down such a quantity of dust that he was fain to retreat.

He waited until it subsided a little, and then made a second attempt—this time with greater care.

But, nevertheless, the dust continued to fall, though not in such large quantities.

It was very fine, pungent, disagreeable dust, too, and made our friends' eyes smart intolerably, while they kept on sneezing, as if for a wager.

At length, after frequently relinquishing the task, they succeeded in drawing both curtains completely across the window.

They then turned away.

To their great vexation, however, they saw there was another window in the room.

However, there was no help for it, so they were forced to go through their disagreeable task once more.

"I think this will do," said Turpin, as he carefully lapped one curtain over the other. "I think that will do."

"No doubt, and now let us have the full benefit of the light from your lantern."

"With pleasure," said Dick, as he withdrew the slide and allowed the full light to stream into the room.

The first thing they did was to turn it in every direction, so as to see what kind of place it was in which they stood.

From its dimensions, and the appearance of the furniture, which, although antique, was very beautiful, despite the coating of dust upon it, they concluded it was the

dining-room of the mansion into which they had made their way.

Everything they saw was full of interest to them, and our friends spent a good ten minutes in looking at the different objects.

A large, substantial-looking table ran down the centre of this room, with a dozen or so chairs placed around it.

But what was most singular was, that upon this table were a number of small articles, which a closer examination showed our friends were the remains of a repast.

They were astonished beyond measure.

"It seems to me," said Dick, "that the old baronet's will was carried out to the very letter."

"Most singular," said King. "But Dick, my friend, I am very cold!"

"So am I. This place strikes as cold and damp as a charnel-house."

"It is very natural it should when we consider how long it has been shut up. We must remedy it."

"By lighting a fire, I suppose you mean? Do you think it would be safe to do so?"

"Oh! yes! Look, there is the fire-place."

"I see it, but I don't perceive any fuel."

"That won't be a difficulty. Just lend me that little jemmy of yours, and I'll soon have some fuel."

Dick gave King the crowbar which he carried with him.

As soon as he had it, Tom commenced a very ferocious attack upon one of the chairs, and soon had it lying in fragments on the floor.

Another shared its fate.

Then he carefully placed a portion of the wood upon the hearthstone.

It was one of those old fashioned grates, provided with dogs, as they were called, which were pieces of iron for wood to rest upon horizontally.

Tom King laid the remains of the chairs in the shape of a pyramid, and then set light to them.

It was some time before he could get them to ignite properly, but when they fairly burst into a flame they burned away first-rate.

In a short time, now, quite a brilliant light filled the apartment, and revealed its most hidden recesses.

Very picturesque it looked in the ruddy and incontinent firelight, which made strange, oddly-shaped shadows flicker on the wall.

"We must look out for seats of some kind now," said Tom King, "and then we shall be quite cosy and comfortable."

"We cannot have anything better than a couple of these old arm chairs."

"But the dust!"

"Oh! we can easily get rid of that."

So saying, Tom King set about freeing his chair from the heaps of dust upon it.

Turpin took another, and followed his example.

And now, as the dust was removed, the richness and beauty of the chairs became at once apparent.

In particular the one which Turpin had taken for his own use.

It was the one that stood always at the top of the table.

The back was very high, and cushioned with crimson velvet, upon which the coat of arms belonging to the Durley family had been embroidered in gold.

The velvet had faded slightly in places, but the device itself was as bright as new.

The arms and legs of this chair were also very beautifully carved, while the upper part of the back had been wrought into the shape of a coronet.

Dick was pleased with the grandeur of this piece of furniture, and he was very careful to cleanse it from every particle of dirt.

Then he looked at it with admiration, and called his comrade's attention to it.

The firelight fell fully upon it, and imparted to it an appearance of great magnificence.

"Beautiful!" was Tom's involuntary exclamation when he gazed upon it.

He had been busily engaged in dusting his own chair, and had not paid any attention to Dick, so the beauty of this chair burst upon him all at once.

The one which King had was a very handsome one, but it would not bear comparison with Turpin's.

"I suppose," said the latter, when they had both looked at it sufficiently, and as he seated himself in it, "I suppose this is the chair in which Sir Ernest and his forefathers were wont to sit."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Tom King, as he also seated himself. "I wonder if he ever thought it would be occupied by Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

CHAPTER LI.

DETAILS HOW IT WAS DICK TURPIN TOOK TO THE ROAD, AND HOW HE OBTAINED POSSESSION OF BLACK BESS.

"Not exactly, you may depend," replied Dick, as he settled himself more comfortably in the family chair, and stretched out his legs towards the glowing embers. "Heap on a little more wood, and then, while we are taking our ease, just tell us what you know about Durley Chase."

"Certainly," said Tom, casting the remainder of the chairs upon the hearth.

This had the effect of dulling the light for a few minutes, while the smoke arose in quite a thick mass.

"Tom," said Dick, suddenly. "You've done it!"

"What?"

"You know how careful you were about not showing a light, and drawing the curtains over the windows?"

"Well, well?"

"Well! You have just put on all that wood, and where do you think the smoke's going to?"

"Out of the top of the chimney, of course! It was an oversight on my part, certainly. Still, as it is night, and the chimneys are very high, I don't suppose it can possibly be seen, for it will be little more than vapour by the time it reaches the top."

"I suppose not. However, if it comes out in a cloud, it cannot be helped now."

"No, but I shall certainly be more careful the next time I put any on."

"Do so. Ah! that's better!"

A broad flame shot up the chimney as Dick spoke, and so put an end to the smoke by consuming it.

"We are very snug here," said Tom, taking off his hat, and hanging it on one of the projections of the carving on his chair back, and throwing his pistols carelessly on the floor; "quite snug and cosy."

"We are that; and after knocking about as we have been lately this is quite a grateful change."

"I only hope we shall be left undisturbed for a day or two, and then I shall be able to get my strength up."

"And I."

"In the morning, though, and when we can have daylight to aid us, we will make a thorough exploration of the place, and, if we can, visit every nook and corner in it."

"Agreed! I should like that vastly. But come, in the meantime, just be kind enough to put me in possession of the facts you know concerning the desertion of Durley Chase."

"The facts?"

"Yes."

"Those simply?"

"Of course."

"Oh! I meant to have thrown all that I have heard, without reference to being facts or not, into the form of a narrative."

"H-m! ah! perhaps it will be as well."

"It will not take very many words, or a very long time. The story is, in itself, simple, yet most terrible."

Tom paused a moment or so.

Dick kicked the fire together with his foot.

"You must understand, first of all," resumed Tom King, "that when Sir Ernest Dane died, that is to say in 1717, he was very closely upon sixty years of age."

"In all the accounts that I have ever heard of him he has been represented as a dark-souled, evil man, whose youth was spent in riotous living and debauch, and his old age in sorrow and in shame."

"I am afraid, Tom," interrupted Dick, "that the description would apply to very many baronets; and not only baronets, but those who rank among the highest in the land."

"Yes; but thank heaven: if there be many like him, yet there are some who show us what human nature ought to

be when the accident of birth raises it above the majority of mankind."

"I don't deny that; but never mind, get on with your story."

"Yes; but, bear in mind, I cannot vouch for the truth of any of these assertions, for not only was I never in this part of the country before, but I have never seen Sir Ernest Dane."

"Then you speak by hearsay?"

"Quite. I have been told, that at the age of fifty, he was remarkable for his shrivelled diminutive person, and his vindictive malice, which peeped out on the most trivial occasions."

"What a delightful old man!"

"Despite his numberless extravagancies, which would have been sufficient to ruin most men, he, at the time of which I am speaking, namely, ten years before his decease, was possessed of considerable riches, as well as many estates, which were all, however, strictly entailed."

"That accounts for it, perhaps."

"Very likely. Now this old, hoary-headed sinner, had not at all improved since the days of his youth. To be sure, his body failed him, for excesses such as he had indulged in always leave their traces behind them. Yet the salaciousness of his disposition was in full vigour, and the old lecher professed to fall in love with the daughter of a Mr. Enderby, a gentleman of means, who resided not far from Durlay Chine."

When King reached this part of his narrative, Turpin removed his eyes from the fire upon which they had been resting, and fixed them upon his comrade's countenance. He already anticipated the catastrophe, and he listened with intense interest for the continuation of the story.

"It was said that if you had searched the counties of Dorset, Devon, and Hants, you would never have found a maiden who could compare with Kate Enderby, either for personal beauty or those manifold attractions which are most endearing in woman."

"Such, then, was the being whom Sir Ernest Dane polluted with his thoughts. She—fresh, rosy, and seventeen—he jejuned, decrepit, and fifty, with one foot already in the grave."

"But Sidney Enderby, the father of Kate, was a man in whom no generous emotions could be found. His disposition was more sordid than it is easily possible to conceive any one's to be."

"He and Sir Ernest Dane formed a pair well suited to each other."

"You have drawn a nice portrait of them at all events. Upon my word, Tom, I should never have believed you were so graphic."

"Now, stop that, Dick, or not another word do you get out of me."

"Oh! never mind! I only said what I thought! Get along!"

"No sooner, then, did Sir Ernest apply to Mr. Enderby for his daughter's hand, than the latter, with many extravagant protestations of delight, assured him that his dearest wish was to see Kate united to his friend and neighbour."

"And so, without having a whisper, let alone a voice, in the matter, Kate Enderby was disposed of to Sir Ernest Dane."

"It was in vain she prayed and wept not to be forced into so hateful an alliance—in vain she urged that she had pledged her troth to another who was then upon the bright, blue waters—her father was deaf to all—and, terrified by his violence, and more dead than alive, the beautiful young Kate Enderby, who, one would have thought, certainly deserved a happier and more congenial fate, was wedded by that outrage upon humanity, the owner and resident of this mansion."

Dick looked around him, by the aid of the bright fire-light, with a strange feeling in his breast. He could almost fancy—although Tom had given him no description of her personal appearance—that he could see the unhappy bride, pale and sad, seated in one of the gloomy, funereal-looking chairs.

Indeed, so strong did this delusion grow upon him, that he was obliged to rise and walk across the room to where he fancied he could see her, before he felt quite certain that it was a trick of his imagination.

His comrade watched him with some surprise, but he said nothing.

Then Turpin re-seated himself, and King went on.

"For two years all went quietly, and, to all appearance, well. Poor Kate's face, whenever it was seen, had always the traces of a heart's sorrow upon it; but, for all that, she looked beautiful, as she flitted like a spectre about the ghostly mansion."

"As for Sir Ernest, he grew more hateful and more hideous every day."

"At length, a change came over Kate."

"She no longer looked sorrowful, as she did, though her face wore anything but a cheerful expression. The colour began to return to her cheeks, and her wasted form to fill out to its proper proportions."

"How was this?" asked those who saw her, "Has she at length resigned herself to her lot, and resolved to be as happy as circumstances would allow." Alas, no! It was neither of these causes that induced the change in Kate's appearance."

"No one marvelled at it more than her husband."

"He revolved the matter continually in his mind, but he was unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion."

"The surprise which he first felt very quickly merged into undefined alarm."

"Among the servants belonging to the mansion of course this matter was freely canvassed, and they soon felt sure they had penetrated to the core of the mystery."

"More than one while out at a late hour during the night, or while gazing from their chamber windows, had observed a shadowy form fitting from tree to tree."

"They immediately—rightly or wrongly—connected this circumstance with the alteration in their mistress, and many a lily hint were dropped about it."

"Shortly afterwards, however, Sir Ernest's wife was observed to lapse into her old trifling state."

"For nearly four years, then, did this state of things continue; but at the expiration of that time, one of the keepers in the park, while out late one winter's night, saw the mysterious shadowy figure."

"Naturally enough they looked towards their mistress for some visible manifestation of this, for they still persisted in the connection they had formed between her and the figure; but they were disappointed. Lymx-eyed though they were, they failed to perceive any difference in her countenance. It still wore the same air of deep dejection that it had during the last four years."

Tom paused for a moment to regain his breath, but Turpin, who was breathlessly interested in the story, waved his hand impatiently for him to go on. He was too unwrapt to speak.

"I have not much more to tell you now. All at once a report was circulated that filled the mansion and the country surrounding it with blank astonishment."

"It was some time before it was believed, but every day some new fact turned up to stamp the rumour with the indelible impress of truth."

"Sir Ernest Dane's young wife had eloped!"

"But with whom?"

"That was the question."

"Then the story of the shadowy figure which had been seen, got talked about and known."

"Sir Ernest had the country scoured in search of his lost bride, but all in vain. Not the slightest trace of her was found."

"In prosecuting their search, it also became known that Ralph Anderson the young sailor, to whom Kate was betrothed, had returned in safety in his ship to Plymouth, that he had left her on leave of absence, and then never re-appeared."

"This seemed to point strongly to the supposition that it was with Ralph that Sir Ernest's wife had eloped."

"Of this, however, there was no proof; but young Anderson never rejoined his ship, and Kate was never found!"

CHAPTER LIII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN DISCOVER THE SAD FATE THAT BEFELL RALPH ANDERSON AND KATE.

DICK TURPIN waited in silence for Tom King to continue his mysterious narrative.

To his surprise he remained silent.

"Surely," Dick said, at length, and it was in a tone of disappointment and vexation that he spoke, "surely, you do not mean to say that this is all you can tell me about the desertion of Durlay Chine?"

"Almost it is!"

"Then it is most unsatisfactory."

"How deep an interest you have taken in it. But what more did you expect to hear?"

"All the particulars about shutting up the place in this fashion, and the motive for Sir Ernest making the strange will he did."

"Then, my friend, you want to know more than any living person knows, I fancy."

"But, surely, some account was given of it."

"Oh! very many; but whether true or not, who can tell?"

"And what happened here after the elopement?" Can you tell me that?"

"I can give you some particulars of it."

"Do so, then, I beg, by all means."

"For some months after the event Sir Ernest roomed about the old mansion like an unsettled ghost. He grew excessively frightened, and would not venture anywhere alone! His eyes got bloodshot and deeply sunken in their orbits. He refused to eat, and became the living personification of a conscience-stricken man."

"There were some who went so far as to say that guilt of the deepest blackness could alone wreak such an effect upon anyone; while others, who were more charitably disposed towards him, assigned it to the removals he must have felt for having blighted the fair future of the girl who had been forced into a union with him, and whose life he had made a miserable burden."

"I ought to have told you that immediately after the elopement of his wife, Sir Ernest caused the room which she habitually occupied to be shut up, and forbade any of his dependents to ever enter it."

"That is a very strange circumstance," said Tarpin, "is it not?"

"Well, I don't know. It is only natural, I think, that he should wish her to be forgotten, and, if possible, to forget her himself."

"Then he took the step that was, above all others, calculated to cause her to be kept in remembrance, that's all I can say."

"Like enough—like enough!"

"But go on, my friend. Just let us hear of the closing up of the place."

"In a little while, then, Sir Ernest took to his bed, and he never rose from it again."

"About three hours before his decease he had his will made, which, after having stated in what manner his property was to be distributed, stipulated that immediately after his funeral the mansion of Durely Chine should be vacated; that all things which it contained should be left in the precise positions they then occupied; that every door was to be locked; every window fastened; the park palings to be thoroughly repaired in every part; that the entrance gates should be firmly locked; and then the whole left unvisited by a human being for the space of one hundred years, dating from the day of his demise."

"What a singular will! Surely, such a one was never known before."

"Scarcely, I should think, and yet some strange things have been done in that way, and doubtless will be. To finish—he bequeathed a sum of money for building the monument in the lane, about which he gave the most minute instructions, and also sunk a further sum which was to defray the expense of keeping the palings and the monument in repair; and also to prosecute any one who was found trespassing either in the house or on the adjoining lands."

Tom paused, and then, observing Dick was silent, he added—

"Surely you do not wish me to tell you that the baronet's instructions were carried out to the very letter. I should think you have already seen sufficient to tell you that."

Dick raised his head.

"I was not thinking of that exactly."

"What then?"

"I was running the whole story over in my mind, and endeavouring to come to some conclusion."

"And have you succeeded?"

"To a certain extent I have."

"To what conclusion, then, have you come?"

Dick placed his hand upon the corner of the old-

fashioned dining-table, and, looking King full in the face, replied, in a tone of deep and earnest conviction—

"The conclusion to which I have come I make no doubt will surprise you beyond measure, unless your thoughts have happened to take the same turn as my own."

It was now King's turn to feel anxiously interested, and he asked—

"Tell me what it is."

"I am firmly of belief," said Dick, "that Sir Ernest's wife never eloped at all!"

The deliberate manner in which Tarpin enunciated this opinion quite staggered Tom King.

"Really, Dick," he said, "that is an extraordinary idea; but, now you have started it, I begin to be quise of your way of thinking."

"And is it possible, Tom, that it has never occurred to you before? Why, a thousand things indicate such a thing."

"I must confess," said Tom, "I never thought of it. I somehow or other quite took it for granted that Sir Ernest's wife eloped."

"And many more did beside, and so thought no more about the matter; but, take my word for it, Tom, there is something more in this than the world, perhaps, will ever know."

"Very like—very like. Now you have given me the start, or clue, as I may call it, things innumerable come thronging into my mind."

"Let us wait until the morning, Tom. We will then together spend the whole of the day in searching over the place, and it will be odd to me indeed if what I suspect is not in some way or other confirmed. I wish I knew which was the room Sir Ernest's wife occupied."

"I cannot guide you in that, for I have no more idea than yourself. Still, I should think, in going over the house, we shall find it."

"No doubt of that. The difficulty will be to know when we do find it."

"That's it, but don't let us vex our brains by thinking any more about it to-night. We cannot elicit anything more. Consent to let the subject drop until the morning, when I hope we shall be able to renew it, and arrive at some satisfactory result."

"With all my heart. I say drop the subject, if you have grown tired of it. But what shall we talk about or do instead, for I can assure you I do not feel sleepy in the least."

"Nor do I. I feel that it would be quite out of the question."

"Well, then, I ask what are we to do. Start another subject, Tom, or else let us go back to Sir Ernest Dane."

"No—no, don't let us do that. I have, believe me, heard quite enough about him for one night."

"Very well. What shall be the new subject?"

"What should you like?"

"Oh! anything, I am not in the least particular."

"Very well. Do you recollect that you made me a promise, and repeated it more than once? Now we are as quiet and comfortable, I am sure, as anyone could wish to be, and I am sure you will never have a better opportunity, and it will be some hours to daybreak, and—"

"There, stop—stop! that will do!"

"You guess, then, what I am about to say?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well."

"You want me to relate some of my back history to you?"

"That's it."

"Before I made your acquaintance?"

"Exactly; before I had the honour of your acquaintance."

"Well, then, if you are inclined to listen, I will tell you all, from my birth upwards."

"You need not go quite so far back as that."

"Very well. But there is a condition. Can you guess it?"

"I can."

"If we are here, then, to-morrow night, as we are to-night, that you will relate your life, for I am very anxious to hear it. I know it must be full of interest."

A slight shade overspread Tom's countenance, as Dick

spoke, but it disappeared almost immediately, as he replied :

"I do not know what your opinion will be as to its interest, but I can tell you beforehand that it will be rather a sad affair."

"Oh, never mind that. Mine is not altogether cheerful, but you must promise to return the compliment before I begin."

"I will; and now start at once."

"Don't be too impatient! I must have time to think it over a little. But don't you see how low the fire is?"

"I do now, but I didn't when you spoke."

"It must be replenished. Why, I do believe if we had left it a quarter of an hour longer it would have gone out altogether."

"Yes; a fire soon dies out when it once takes the turn. Stop a minute, and I'll soon have some more fuel."

"But it seems a great shame to destroy such handsome furniture."

"It does, I quite agree with you; but it cannot be helped. Can it?"

"I don't see how it can."

"Lend me the jemmy, then, and I'll soon have this one to pieces."

So saying, Tom dragged one of the chairs towards the fire, and, having received the crowbar from Dick, he very quickly broke it up into fragments.

He placed a good half upon the fire.

"Now, Dick," he said, as he reseated himself, and leaned back in his chair, "I'm all attention, so just make a start."

"Very good," said Turpin, who, after a premonitory ahem! commenced the story of his life without further preface or hesitation.

CHAPTER LIII.

DESCRIBES HOW TURPIN COMMITTED HIS FIRST BOBBERY ON THE HIGHWAY.

"You must know, Tom," said Dick, "that I cannot boast of anything grand with respect to my parentage. My father was a butcher——"

"And so was Volsey's," interrupted Tom.

"He was generally considered a well-to-do man by his neighbours; but, in the course of time, one or two things dropped out that had rather a damaging effect upon his character.

"It was always their intention to bring me up to the same trade, but somehow I did not like it. In fact, I was ambitious to be a gentleman.

"However, not far from where I was born, namely, at Thaxted, in Essex, there was a very large estate and a park that was quite overstocked with deer, belonging to a magistrate named Sir Thomas Deane.

"Well, in spite of the strictness with which he endeavoured to keep up the game laws, and the heavy punishments he visited upon offenders, somehow or other, the keepers were always reporting the loss of his deer.

"There was about a dozen harum scarum fellows like myself, always hanging about, and having apparently nothing to do, and we were everyone of us looked upon with the greatest suspicion by Sir Thomas Deane and his keepers, though, for a long time, nothing could be brought against us.

"One fine night, though, as the whole party of us were standing over a fine buck that had just been brought down, we heard a loud shout, and before we could as much as look round, we found ourselves hemmed in by keepers and various other people belonging to the estate.

"Resistance was almost useless, but we showed fight, and one or two managed to get off, but the remainder, myself included, were captured, handcuffed, and lodged in the village cage, round which guard was kept until the morning, when we were marshalled into the presence of the magistrate, Sir Thomas Deane.

"He scowled upon us when we entered, and took his seat upon the bench. You may depend he treated the case in a very summary manner. He found us all guilty, and committed us to the assizes.

"As it so happened, we had not long to wait, for on the Monday morning the assizes commenced, and our case came on for hearing on Wednesday.

"The evidence against us was very conclusive, so the jury brought us in guilty, and the judge sentenced them all very heavily, with the exception of myself, who he let off lightly, so he said, because I was the youngest of them all, and the only evidence against me was that I was standing with the others. I ought to have told you that my father got a counsel to defend, and the line he adopted was that I was passing through the park at the time and stopped to see what was going on, and so came to be apprehended. I therefore got off with six months' imprisonment in the county jail with hard labour. But I found it terribly irksome and disagreeable, and before I had been in prison a fortnight I made up my mind to escape.

"An opportunity soon afterwards occurred, and I availed myself of it, and, after some trouble, did get free.

"Thaxted was very quickly left behind me, and I shaped my way directly for London. Of course, I had no money in my pocket, the jailors took good care of that. I was, besides, clothed in the prison dress, and this it was imperative I should get rid of, or I should be detected and apprehended immediately.

"I was walking along the London road, turning these things over in my mind, when I heard some one coming towards me at a sharp trot. It was just getting day-break.

"Now, what shall I do?" I thought to myself. 'Here is come one coming who doubtless possesses the very articles so necessary for me to have. Shall I strain a point for once, and take them from him?'

"The traveller I could hear coming nearer and nearer.

"It must be so, I said. 'Such a chance will perhaps never happen again, and now I have gone so far, I am determined not to be caught and taken back to jail.'

"So, having come to this resolution, I drew aside into the shadow of the hedgerow, and waited for the traveller to pass me.

"In a minute or two I saw his horse's head on a level with me, and shouting, 'Stand!' in as loud and as gruff a voice as I could assume, I darted out from my place of concealment, and caught the horse by the bridle.

"Stand!' I said again. 'I am a desperate man! Your money or your life!'

"You shall have neither, you villain!' said a voice which I recognised instantly. 'Take that!'

"It was the voice of Sir Thomas Deane.

"Chance, then, had thus strangely brought about a meeting between us.

"I was rather startled, you may guess, and almost frightened, for this was the first affair of the kind in which I had ever been engaged.

"When Sir Thomas said, 'Take that!' I saw a faint flash, and heard a click.

"He had aimed a pistol at me, but it had missed fire.

"He uttered a curse as he found this was the case, but before it was well out of his mouth I had sprung upon him, wrested the pistol from his grasp, and dealt him a heavy blow on the head with the butt end of it.

"He fell off his horse at once.

"I was rather scared, I can tell you, when I saw the effects of my blow, but I felt I had gone too far to retreat, so I stooped down and began to rifle his pockets.

"I found in them a considerable sum of money, for he had been up to London to draw some money out of the bank. I also took a handsome gold watch, of which I knew he was excessively proud, and several other articles of less value.

"I had done all this without finding him give the least signs of life, but he now began to be aroused.

"Thinking it best to be prepared, I went up to his horse, which was standing still enough in the middle of the road, and took the other pistol from the holster.

"When I got back to Sir Thomas, he was sitting up in the road and rubbing his head in a very lugubrious fashion.

"I had not done with him yet.

"Come, Sir Thomas, arouse yourself. Strip off your clothes immediately; or if you don't like to do that, I will put a bullet through your skull, and take them off after you are dead, which will save you the trouble."

"I could see Sir Thomas shook a little at this, and like a prudent man he began to divest himself of his clothes.

"He pulled off his coat.

"Then his vest.
 "He would have stopped, but a menace caused him to proceed.
 "He took off his cravat and ruffles, and then his shirt.
 "He paused again.
 "'Be quick,' said I; 'off with your breeches and boots!'
 "He looked at me in amazement; but finding I was terribly in earnest, complied."
 "He took it very quietly, I think," said Tom; "didn't he?"
 "He did! The fact is, he was only half conscious of what he was about. A good crack with a pistol is apt to have a confusing effect."
 "I believe you. However, go on. What did you do when he had stripped himself?"
 "Why, I stripped off my own clothes in a twinkling, and attired myself in his.
 "'There,' said I, when I had done. 'You needn't look so down. You can put on the clothes I have just taken off.'
 "He glared at me for a moment, and then began scrambling them on.
 "'If you hadn't been so particular after your deer, one or two of which you could very well afford to spare, this would not have happened. Do you recollect me?' I said; 'I am Jack Palmer, whom you sentenced a little while back at the assizes.'
 "Jack who?" said Tom King.
 "Jack Palmer. I forgot to tell you that is my right name."
 "Oh! indeed!"
 "Yes, I assumed the name of Richard Turpin some time afterwards."
 "The deuce you did! However, go on with your story."
 "He recollected my name, of course.
 "'Curse you, you villain!' he said. 'Curse you, I wish you had been hanged!'
 "I daresay you do! Good morning, Sir Thomas! a pleasant journey! This seems to be a nice little bit of horseflesh, I'll borrow that, too."
 "So saying, I jumped on the horse's back, and turned his head towards London.
 "To my surprise, as I rode off, I actually heard Sir Thomas give vent to a chuckling laugh, which sounded more like a gander in the last agonies of strangulation than anything else.
 "A sharp canter, though, soon left him far behind."

CHAPTER LIV.

RELATES HOW TURPIN STOLE HIS CELEBRATED MARE
 BLACK BEN.

"AND so that was your first little adventure on the road, was it, Dick?"
 "It was."
 "Well, all I can say, you did things in a very bold and creditable manner."
 "Rather! but you have not heard the best of the joke."
 "What is it, then?"
 "This. I was just entering London when I found what it was Sir Thomas was so spasmodically laughing about."
 "Oh! what was it?"
 "When I took off my prison clothes, and gave them to him to put on, I forgot to—"
 "Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!" roared Tom King, heartily. "I see! You forgot to transfer the booty out of the pockets."
 "Just so."
 "Ha! ha! ha! Really now. No wonder the magistrate laughed!"
 "None, indeed! But you must make some allowance for me, Tom."
 "Oh! certainly, certainly."
 "I was rather flustered, you know. It was quite strange to me."
 "Oh! don't make any excuses, I beg. I can quite understand it. I think it served the old magistrate jolly well right!"
 "So do I, for he was a selfish, hard-hearted rascal. However, I can tell you one thing, and that is, I never made such a mistake again."

"No, I should hardly think you would. But come! What did you do when you found you had no money?"
 "Oh! I was not altogether penniless. I found some loose silver in the pockets, which I had disdained to take before."
 "But which you were glad enough of now. Proceed!"
 "Well, I rode into London, and put up at the 'Sarcen's Head,' in Skinner-street, Snow-hill."
 "I know it well."
 "I had a very good breakfast, but I noticed that the landlord eyed me rather suspiciously. My clothes did not altogether look as though they had been made for me.
 "Still he did not venture to make any remark, so I paid him his bill, and went to look after my horse.
 "It was brought out to me very nicely fettle, and, take it alto, ether, it was a very creditable looking piece of horseflesh.
 "Indeed, the ostler made a remark to me to that effect, and added, that if I wished to part with it, he knew someone who would be very glad to become a purchaser.
 "Here was an excellent chance of getting a little money, so I at once told the ostler that though I had not thought of selling, yet I was open to receive a reasonable offer, adding, as well, that I should stand something worth his while if his customer behaved handsomely.
 "I waited in the stable a little while, while the ostler went into the house to fetch the would-be purchaser, who, I found, was staying there.
 "After a little badgering, he agreed to give, and I agreed to take, fifty guineas for Sir Thomas's nag.
 "The money was paid, so I slipped a guinea into the ostler's palm and made myself scarce, for I was sharp enough to know the sooner I was off the better.
 "Indeed, just as I passed out of the archway, I saw a body of police coming from the direction of St. Martin's-le-Grand, so I hastened down Snow-hill, and soon found myself at the back of Field-lane.
 "I had often heard of this place, though I had never seen it.
 "As I perceived no signs of a pursuit, I did not go down it, but found my way into Hatton Garden, and thence to Holborn, where I entered a costumer's and purchased some clothing that suited me better than those I had taken from Sir Thomas Deane."
 "And what did you do next?" asked Tom.
 "You will hardly expect it, but I set out, and for days and days tried to obtain some kind of honourable employment."
 "You succeeded, of course?" said Tom, with a tinge of irony in his words.
 "I did not. My efforts were entirely useless. Everyone to whom I applied wanted some account of my past life, which, of course, I could not give them; though towards the last, the philanthropic appearance of many of the persons to whom I made application, induced me to tell them of my misfortunes, but I was met with such looks of indignant horror for having entertained the idea of asking them for employment, after having been in jail, that I very quickly gave that up."
 "It is always the way, my friend," said Tom King.
 "I have found it so to my cost. When once a man is down, his fellow-men turn upon him like wild beasts, and keep him down. Woe to the unhappy wretch who first loses caste, for let him try afterwards, as he will, he will never be able to regain his position."
 "That is unfortunately too true, my friend. Heaven knows it was from no wish or predilection on my part that I became a highwayman. I was forced into that career in spite of myself."
 "Well, well; do not begin to reflect upon it in that way. It is a subject that will not bear much reflection. It is a short life and a merry one, checkered by many a strange episode, that does not fall to the lot of common humanity."
 "It is. And so, of course, Tom, it is nothing surprising that when my money was all spent I went upon the highway seeking more."
 "Not at all—not at all. You had your choice of two evils—to starve or go upon the road—and you chose the less."
 "Many and many a strange adventure have I had, Tom, during my career, but still such as we may meet with again."

"Just so. I will, however, give you credit for having made yourself notorious in a very short space of time."

"Pretty well. Not more so than yourself."

"You have created for yourself such a reputation as no highwayman since the days of Robin Hood has, and such as no highwayman ever will again. Your name is one that will never be forgotten."

"Pho! pho! stop that. I have only one more point upon which to satisfy your curiosity, and I am done."

"And that is?"

"To tell you how bonny Black Bess came into my hands."

"Ah! yes. I want to hear that above all things."

"Very well, then. It was some little time after I took the road that I stopped the Dover coach."

"Indeed, I remember that little circumstance very distinctly, my friend. It caused quite a consternation."

"A little. You doubtless remember the rewards offered for me?"

"I do. They represented a large amount. The government gave so much—two hundred pounds, I think—and the travellers in the coach made up a like sum."

"They did, and the chase was very hot and close after me. I had many narrow escapes, but the narrowest of all was one fine summer's afternoon, while riding on the high road between Kilburn and Edgware."

"I was going at a very easy pace, for I did not anticipate pursuit, when all of a sudden I was startled by something whistling past my face, and then there was the immediate report of a pistol."

"I confess to being startled greatly, but I had sufficient presence of mind to clap spurs to my steed and then gave a hasty glance behind me."

"Five well-mounted officers were coming along after me at full speed, and as soon as they saw I perceived them they set up a loud shout, which they doubtless intended should have an intimidating effect upon me."

"I was not without a certain misgiving as to the result of the chase, for the horse I was on, though well competent to run a short distance at an amazing speed, yet had not enough bottom in him to keep up for any great length of time. Now, a horse to be really serviceable should combine fleetness with endurance."

"He should," said Tom. "But such horses are very rarely to be met with, even let alone purchased."

"Well, to go on with my story. I had, in a very short time, the satisfaction of seeing that the distance between myself and my pursuers were considerably increased."

"As soon as I observed this, I determined to take all the advantage of it that I could, for I knew my horse would soon slacken speed so much as to allow the officers to overtake me if I kept him upon the highroad."

"I, therefore, sought out on both sides of me for one of those narrow sinuous lanes which are so plentiful in that part of the country, and sure enough before I had gone a hundred yards further, I saw one, and turned down it like a shot."

"From the loud cry to which I heard the officers give mouth, I could tell this manoeuvre had been seen."

"I gathered the reins in my hands, and struck the horse several sharp blows with them about the neck, and at the same time burying my spurs in his sides."

"And now another misfortune happened."

"By some perversity or other, this lane, which was at first rather too serpentine, suddenly straightened, and continued so as far as I could see."

"I had not bettered my position in the least. The officers would be round the bend in a few moments, and then they would be able to keep me in view."

"Just then, on looking in advance, I saw, nearly a mile off, a man on horseback, attended by a groom."

"Here was a new source of vexation, for, of course, the gentleman, as I took him to be, seeing me flying from the police, would try to impede my progress—perhaps even attempt my capture; and, although he might not succeed, yet a collision between us would infallibly give the officers time to pounce upon me."

"All these circumstances and their results passed with full force upon me, and I goaded still more my almost knoeked-up steed."

"He had some of the true blood in him, for, when he felt the sharp points of the spurs, he uttered a loud snort, and set forward at a rate that absolutely amazed me."

"The gentleman in advance came at a trot, looking curiously upon me."

"His groom had fallen back considerably in the rear."

"In another moment we met."

"I had noticed, as I neared him, that the animal which he rode was of the most faultless shape, and exquisite symmetry."

"But when his horse's head was on a level with mine, he pulled up abruptly, and, by a dexterous movement, caught hold of mine by the bridle."

"The officers were thundering along the lane."

"Hands off," I cried, "or it will be the worse for you! I am a desperate man, and flying for my life!"

"Oh! you are, are you?" he said; "then I will see if I cannot put a stop to your gallop! Hi! James! James!"

"James, I made no doubt, was the footman I had seen."

"I just glanced before me, and saw him coming along at a good speed."

Matters were growing desperate.

"Let go my horse!" I cried again, and the loud cries of the officers, and the din of their horses' hoofs almost drowned my voice. "Let go my horse, I say, or take the consequences!"

"I could tell he tightened his hold."

"Then there darted into my mind a wild idea of escape."

"I did not wait to calculate its probabilities of success. If I had, the chances were that I should have abandoned the scheme as absurd, but I did not pause, but instantly put it into execution."

"Before the gentleman on horseback had the least notion of what I was going to do, I drenched my left fist tightly, and struck him a terrific blow on the head."

The blow alighted somewhere near his ear.

"He fell off his horse as though he had been shot."

"This was what I hoped, and I had prepared myself for what I was next about to do."

"That was to spring upon the back of the gentleman's matchless steed."

"I accomplished the feat, difficult in the extreme as it was, but I was saluted with a volley from the pistols of the officers, who had now got into alarmingly close quarters."

"By good fortune one only wounded me, and that was only slightly."

"I turned the horse's head that I had become so strangely and unexpectedly in possession of, and just touched her side with the spur."

"The bound forward that she gave was so terrific that I was almost thrown."

"I, however, succeeded in keeping my seat."

"Away we went, like the very wind itself."

"James made one abortive effort to stop us, but he got rolled in the dust for his pains."

"Yells and screams of disappointed rage came from the throats of the officers."

"But away went the gallant steed, with a rapidity which more and more astonished me, and in a short time the officers were left far behind."

"That bonny mare I have never parted with since, or trusted out of my sight for many hours together. She saved my life then, but it is by no means the only time. I named her Bess in remembrance of some one whom I knew, and black, because that was her colour."

"And it was by such a chance circumstance as this, then, that you became possessed of the finest piece of horseflesh in the kingdom?"

"It was, my friend. Such was the way in which Dick Turpin became the owner of Black Bess."

CHAPTER LV.

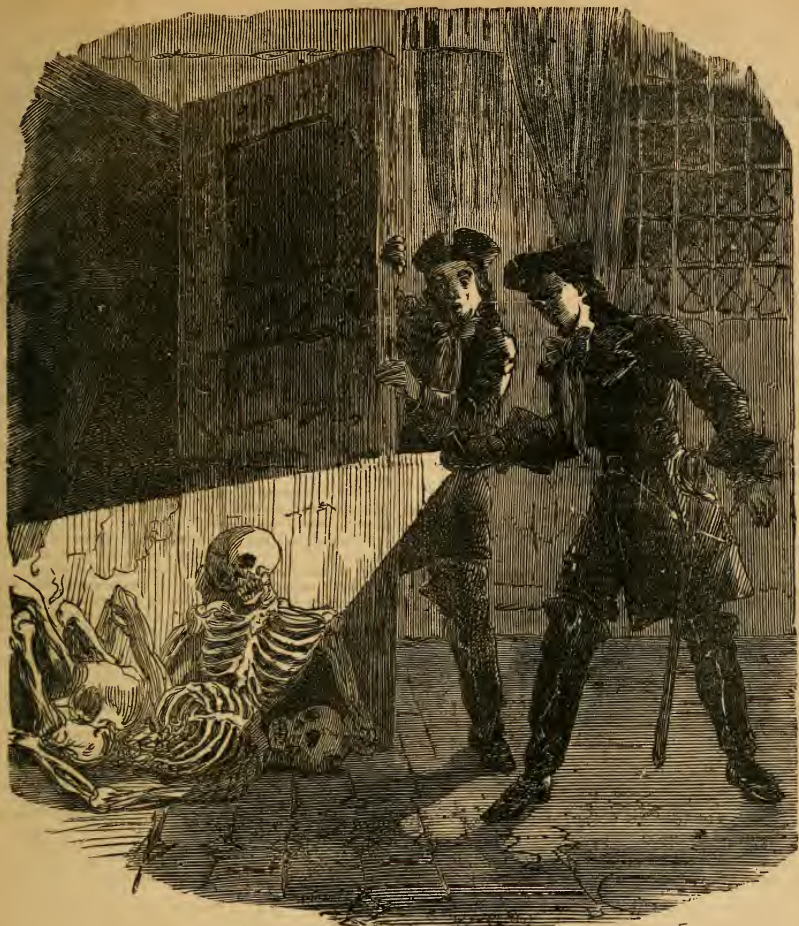
THE SEARCH THROUGH THE OLD MANOR AND ITS RESULTS.

As Turpin uttered these words, he rose from his seat, and walking up to the windows, drew back the thick heavy curtains.

The pale golden beams of the rising sun found their way into the apartment through the many chinks in the curiously-fashioned shutters.

"By Jove!" said Tom King, in accents of surprise, "it is morning! I had no idea of it!"

"Time soon slips away in conversation, and now let me at once commence the exploration of this building."



[TURPIN AND KING DISCOVER THE LOVERS' REMAINS AT DURLEY CHINE.]

"You are very eager about it, Dick."

"I am, and cannot help feeling so. Of this I feel certain, that we shall find something that will amply compensate us for our trouble."

"I wish I could feel as certain that we should find something that would amply compensate us for a breakfast, but I'm afraid we shan't."

"So am I. But come along, who knows what we may not find? You had better shut the door after you, Tom!"

They stood now in the spacious hall belonging to the mansion. The sunshine entered freely through the windows on each side of the door, or at least as freely as the thick coating of dirt with which they were encased would allow.

The numerous objects around them looked strangely spectral and ghostlike in the morning light.

The dust, which had looked black, now seemed of a whitish colour, and it lay upon the floor of the hall like snow.

Our friends' footsteps were perfectly noiseless.

Turpin led the way up the staircase, and Tom followed him in silence.

On the first landing they paused.

Doors they could see in abundance, but where they led to they could not tell. They tried the handles of several, but, as they had been led to expect, found them fast.

"Not here, I fancy," said Tom, "shall we find the wife's chamber, but on the floor above. Good heavens! Dick, what's that?"

Turpin turned round with an expression of alarm upon his face.

A strange noise, like the shrieking of ten thousand fiends, seemed to fill the air around them.

But only for a moment.

It died away then, not with the same suddenness as it arose, but in a faint, hoarse, hollow murmur.

Then all became as silent as the grave.

So abruptly had this sound come upon them that our friends were quite unnerved.

By an effort, Dick Turpin found his voice.

"The mysteries of Durley Chine are beginning to develop themselves," he said.

"It would seem so," replied Tom, uneasily. "But what was it? From whence did it proceed?"

"I can form no idea," said Dick. "It seemed to come from all sides, and whether from above or below I can form no manner of conjecture."

"Nor I. Let us hope that we may never hear such a sound again!"

"Nay! On the contrary, let us hope to do so, and let us be upon our guard, and not be taken by surprise when we do."

Scarcely had the words left his lips, and before Tom King could utter a reply, than there arose, with twice its former intensity, the same fearful sound.

Our friends fastened their eyes upon each other to note the effect this would have.

Both were pale.

Both felt the same question surge up in their minds.

Was what they had so often heard about the supernatural, and what their minds had never hitherto given credence to, real and true?

In that foot-deserted place, so long closed against human beings, it is no wonder such a question and many another of a hundred nature should be engendered.

Despite the control which he habitually had over himself, Dick felt his limbs tremble under him.

Tom King spoke.

His voice was quivering and unsteady.

"This is horrible, Dick," he said, "most horrible."

"It is," said Turpin, "most horrible. I am convinced a living human being could have given utterance to those unearthly sounds."

"Do you know what you imply?"

"I do! And, though as free from superstitious influences as a man can safely assert himself to be, yet I cannot close my eyes to the fact that what we have just heard, and which we are certain can be no delusion of the senses, is sufficient and has indeed sufficed to make me waver in my belief."

"It is enough to do so, and I must confess to the same thing myself, though I am very loath to do it, for I have ever, until now, treated such things in scorn."

Again arose a fearful shrieking cry.

But Dick had been waiting for it—expecting it—and was prepared.

"That came from somewhere above, Tom," he said, "I am certain of it! Follow me!"

He turned and would have sprang up the next flight of stairs, but King caught him by the arm.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Do?" repeated Turpin. "Why this! Feeling confident that the horrible sound came from the upper portion of the mansion, I will ascend and not pause until I have pried into every nook and corner! Why do you hold me back?"

"I know not," said King, confusedly, for he was ashamed of the weakness he had shown. "Come on."

"That's right, my friend! Let us use our best endeavours to discover the source of those dreadful cries! Think how great a satisfaction it will be if we can succeed in discovering from whence they proceed, and trace them to some natural causes!"

"It will—it will!"

"Quick, then, Tom! Mark, there it is again!"

The unearthly cry once more sounded in their ears.

"How much more this would have scared us in the night time!" said King. "Darkness would have endowed it with threefold terror."

"It would. That is only natural. But what surprises me is, that it is so continuous."

By this time our friends had reached, as they thought, the topmost story in the house, but they found there was yet another flight of stairs to be ascended.

Ere, however, they could cross the landing to them, they were again startled by the mysterious cry.

It was pretty certain that it came from above, for the sound reached their ears much more intensely than it did, and they could distinguish in it a strange howling note which they had not previously noticed.

Without the loss of a moment, and before the echoes had entirely died away, Dick sprang up the flight of steps, which were narrower and steeper than the preceding ones. Tom King followed closely.

At the top of the stairs they emerged into a large room or attic.

There were in it two windows, but as they had not been provided with shutters, were boarded over.

The planks, however, did not fit closely enough together to exclude the light, which entered freely in long pencils through the joints.

It is probable enough that when first put up these boards were joined to a nicely, but in the lapse of years they had shrunk, as wood is apt to do.

Our friends could see around them without difficulty.

The attic appeared to have been used merely as a lumber room, for many odds and ends were scattered about the floor.

Tom looked over every part of it with the utmost attention, but he saw nothing that in any way tended to explain the cry.

"We must give it up, I am afraid," said Tom King. "I can see nothing here to cause it."

"And no human being can have been in the place, for look, except where we have ourselves trod, the dust is undisturbed; and no one ascended the stairs before us, for I was careful to look upon them for the imprint of a foot, which would have been as plainly visible as in snow."

"Right!" said Tom. "We must then consider this to be one of the mysteries of Durley Chine which we cannot solve."

"For the present," said Dick, "only for the present. Although we have failed in our first attempt, we may be more fortunate in a second!"

"Perhaps so; but I am afraid not. There is only one thing. Did the sound actually come to us from above when we stood at the foot of the last flight of stairs?"

"So far as my sense of hearing serves me, it did. But I may have been mistaken, for it is always a matter of extreme difficulty to trace such noises to their true source, unless you have something more to guide you than your ears."

"Just go. But is it worth while to stay here any longer? We have seen all there is to see, I fancy."

"I would rather we did not go until we heard the cry again. I have noticed that it has occurred at something like regular intervals."

"So have I."

"Do you then, my friend, stand with your back to mine, so that your eyes command the opposite half of the room to what mine do. Let nothing escape your observation, but have all your senses on the alert!"

"I understand," said Tom King, as he placed himself in the required position. "You think, then, that if we both do this, we shall not only be able to tell beyond a doubt whether the sound actually proceeds from this place, but if it does, be also able to tell from what precise portion of it!"

"Exactly! That, I fancy, is the only means by which we can do it. I'm only impatient now for the cry to come. Fail not to have every sense awake, but do not keep yourself too much on the stretch, or you will defeat yourself that way!"

"I am aware of it. Let us be silent now in order that our speech even may not be the means of confusing us."

With an anxiety, greater than our readers can conceive, the two highwaymen stood back to back in the attic of the deserted mansion, and waited for the repetition of the strange cry, which had naturally so scared them when they first heard it.

Turpin certainly deserves great credit for the manner in which he managed this affair, for surely no better mode of determining from whence the noise came could be devised.

The windows we have mentioned as being in this attic were placed at each extremity.

The ceiling was low, and sloped from the centre.

It would appear that this attic ran from the front to the back of the mansion, for the windows were both in gables of the building.

As our friends thus stood, of course each had a window before him.

In waiting for the strange sound to again make itself

heard, Tom King, whose eyes had rested with the keenest scrutiny upon every object within their sphere, noticed that in the boarding of the window opposite to him there was a small round hole.

Three fingers held close together would have about filled it up.

It was a very trifling thing to notice, but Tom's eyes were just then required to notice trifles.

"There's been a knot there, I suppose," he thought, "and as the wood has shrunk away from it, it has tumbled out. That must be it!"

At any rate it was a probable enough supposition. At length, and just as their patience was getting exhausted, the terrible cry again resounded in their ears.

That it came from the place in which they stood there could not be a doubt.

Tom King echoed it with a shout of gratification. "Hurrah!" he said, "I see it all now! We have been frightening ourselves about nothing!"

"What is it?—what is it?" asked Turpin, anxiously. "Tell me at once!"

King led him to the window.

"There is the secret," he said. "Do you see that round hole in the board?"

"I do."

"Look a little closer, and you will see that the pane beyond is broken!"

"So it is, Tom!" said Turpin, after a momentary observation. "But do you mean to say that the noise came from there, and that the wind blowing through caused it?"

"Most certainly I do! I noticed the hole in the board and fixed my eye upon it, and presently the noise came, and I was confident, through that hole. I take it that when a gust of wind comes in one particular direction, it rushes through that little hole with extraordinary violence, and makes the horrible sound which so alarmed us!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN MAKE A FORCIBLE ENTRY INTO SIR ERNEST'S CHAMBER, AND DISCOVER THE TRACES OF A FRIGHTFUL DOMESTIC TRAGEDY.

THAT this was the real solution of the mysterious crisis there could be little or no doubt.

Just the least tinge of vexation was apparent in Dick's voice and countenance when he spoke.

"What fools we both were to allow ourselves to be terrified by a sound that admits of so easy explanation!"

"Do not chafe, Dick!" said Tom King. "I regard it as being extremely fortunate!"

"How so?"

"Thus. In our exploration of the mansion, which we cannot say we have fairly commenced, if we hear any sound for which we may not be able to account, the simple means by which this horrible howling is produced will teach us not to be alarmed at it in the least, and induce the belief that it is produced by natural causes only!"

"Looking at it in that light it certainly is fortunate," replied Turpin; "but what annoys me is that I should have allowed it to unman me as it did. I ought to have known that an old deserted place like this would be full of strange noises."

"I can find every excuse for you, Dick. The cry was certainly a most fearful and unearthly one, and sufficient, coming unexpectedly as it did upon us, to strike terror into the bravest heart. Hark! there it is again!"

With a prolonged, wailing howl, the wind again rushed through the circular hole in the board.

"Come away, Tom! Come away!" said Turpin. "It is useless to stay here any longer. Let us try to find out something more about Ralph Anderdon and Sir Ernest's wife!"

"Agreed! But is it possible, think you, to put a stop to this noise? Although we know what it is, it is none the less unpleasant!"

"A good thought, Tom. It shall be done. A large piece of paper screwed up and pushed tightly in, will stop it up as well as anything."

"It will."

Dick rummaged his pockets, and at last found a piece of a newspaper.

This he folded and rolled up tightly in the form of a plug, and stuffed into the hole.

"That will do it, I think," he said. "Now, Tom, come along!"

The highwaymen then, without further delay, left the attic.

They paced upon the landing beneath, from which two long corridors ran right and left, having doors opening from them.

"What do you think of doing with these rooms, Dick? Surely you do not intend to open them every one? If you do it will take us some time, for they are sure to be all locked. I should imagine these were the servants' dormitories."

"Very likely! I think, however, just to satisfy ourselves, we will open one of the doors. Should your supposition turn out correct, we will leave the others as they are."

To this Tom at once agreed; and Turpin, producing a bunch of skeleton keys, very soon had the door open. They entered with great curiosity.

It was plainly furnished, and evidently, from its appearance generally, a servant's bedroom.

Our friends merely glanced round this apartment and then retired. There was nothing there at all extraordinary.

Dick was careful to lock the door again after him, so that at a future time no suspicion might be aroused that they had entered there.

"I think we may safely jump to the conclusion that all these numerous doors open only into such chambers as the one we have just seen the interior of."

"Very well; we will try the floor below."

Accordingly another flight of stairs was descended, and they found themselves standing upon a landing precisely similar to the one they had just left.

Here the doors were wider and higher and not so close together.

Turpin again had recourse to his skeleton keys, and one after another opened these doors.

They were all bed-chambers.

At last, after having well nigh lost all patience, and hope of finding Sir Ernest's bed-chamber, our friends came to a door where some substance had been placed over the keyhole.

Dick wiped away the dust which lay very thickly upon it, and found it was sealing-wax, or some similar substance which had been placed over it.

A closer examination showed him that Sir Ernest's coat of arms was impressed upon this seal.

He called Tom's attention to it.

"If we had known," he said, "that the lock had been sealed, we should have been spared a great deal of trouble, for I make no doubt that as we have found none of the other doors with a seal upon them, that this is the one opening into Sir Ernest's own room."

"Nor I, either. Break the seal, Dick, and open it at once."

With his knife, Dick chipped away the sealing-wax which had become almost as hard as iron.

To his mortification, however, he found, when he had taken the trouble to do this, that the keyhole itself was filled up with some hard substance, which clung so tightly that he gave up all hope of getting it out, after making several efforts, and breaking the point of his knife in the attempt.

"What is to be done?" he said. "Confound him for fastening up the door in this fashion!"

"So say I. There is but one course left, my friend, and that is to cut out one of the panels with our hangers, and enter the room in that fashion."

"I do not see in what other way we are to accomplish our object, and yet I am reluctant to destroy the door. However, it cannot be helped, for I have set my mind upon finding out something more about the ultimate fate of poor Kate."

"Here goes, then," said King, who had drawn his hanger; "leave this job to me."

"Not so, my friend. You forget your wound. It is evidently getting better, but take my advice, do not use it any more than you can help just at present."

"Very well," said King, drawing back, "do you do it, then."

In a very business-like manner did Turpin set about cutting out the panel.

His weapon was strong and keen-pointed.

Taking a careful aim, he gave a sudden thrust.

The sword went quite through the panel at that point where it was morticed into the door, and consequently thinned.

Then with working it about, and peering he vily upon the back, he cut completely down one side of it.

He repeated the same process with the other side.

There then remained the most difficult part to do, namely, to cut the top and bottom of the panel, which would be, of course, against the grain of the wood.

A little perseverance, however, will do wonders, and our friends soon had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing a hole in the door large enough for the man to pass through one at a time.

This room was in the front of the mansion, and the sun, which was shining upon it, found its way in through the bars of the shutters, the peculiar shape of which we have already described.

Turpin's impatience to enter this room was so great, that scarcely had the panel fallen bodily inward, than he crept through the hole he had made, leaving Tom to follow his example as best he could.

King was soon in also, and the highwaymen looked about them with the greatest curiosity and interest.

The subdued light which filled the room seemed more congenial than if the broad daylight had revealed its every nook and angle.

The apartment was a spacious and a lofty one.

The furniture was massive and gorgeous.

In one recess was a huge funeral-looking tent bedstead, of that kind in which our ancestors used particularly to delight.

The curtains were drawn closely around it.

They looked heavy and sombre.

The four posts of the bedstead were surmounted with a large plume of feathers, resembling those which are seen on hearse at the present day.

It was full five minutes before either of the highwaymen spoke.

The whole of their faculties were bent upon an attentive and minute examination of the chamber they had entered, and which they were firmly of opinion was the one that used to be tenanted by Sir Ernest and his wife.

Tom King was the one who spoke first.

The intense stillness of that gloomy room oppressed him.

"I think we have entered the right place, Dick, don't you? An apartment like this would surely be the one set aside for the occupation of the owner of the mansion."

"Yes—yes. In this room, Tom, beyond a doubt, the baronet's fair wife, in whose mysterious fate I feel so deep an interest, pined away her young life, like a wild bird in a cage."

"You seem strangely moved, Dick."

"I am. I feel the profoundest pity for the unhappy girl, and there is also some prescient feeling within me which makes me conscious that this long shut-up room has been the scene of a terrible tragedy."

"How strange!" said Tom, and his voice grew hushed and solemn. "The words you have just uttered seem to have given consistency and method to the vague and undefined ideas which were floating about in my mind."

"The simple circumstance of being in a deserted chamber, and being surrounded by a silence so intense as we are, is sufficient of itself to people the brain with thick-coming fancies, but, apart from them, I feel that we stand upon the threshold of a discovery that will cause the current of our blood to stagnate in our veins."

"How seriously and earnestly you speak, Dick," said Tom King, who remained for a moment or two quite motionless and silent after his companion spoke. "You infect me with your own gloomy forebodings!"

Turpin made no reply.

His eyes were roaming over every nook and corner of the apartment.

To him all things in it were distinctly visible, though if any one had suddenly come in out of the sunlight they would not have been able to see at all.

But Dick's eyes had become perfectly accustomed to the dim light.

He crept to the side of the room opposite to where he had been standing, and appeared to scrutinise something very closely.

Then he turned towards King, who had not moved from his position, and said—

"Look here, Tom! Unless I am quite out in my calculations, it is here we must look to find the solution of the mysterious disappearance of Ralph Arderdon and Sir Ernest's fair young bride—the secret of Durlay Chine!"

CHAPTER LVII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON A RATHER PRELUDING EXPEDITION.

THERE was something so very solemn and impressive in Dick's manner that Tom King was completely overawed, and it was with a strange beating at his heart that he made his way towards the spot where his friend stood.

"What have you found, Dick?" he said. "What is it?"

"This," replied Turpin, placing his hand upon a door in the wall. "This door is of iron, and can only lead to one place, and that is a small strong room wherein jewels and such like things are kept."

"I am aware," said Tom, in a tone of disappointment, "I am aware there are usually such places in the chambers of the great. But what has that to do with the secret of Durlay Chine?"

"Everything!" said Dick, who in this instance seemed to be gifted with a strange kind of foresight. "The secret of Durlay Chine will I fancy turn out no secret to me! I seem somehow to have divined it from the first, and as soon as I saw that door I was convinced that I was right!"

"I confess I am fairly puzzled to understand you. However, if that door is all that hides the secret from our view, I say open it at once!"

"I intend to do so, my friend. It will, though, I think take some time."

As he spoke, Turpin produced from his pocket several small implements, with which he at once made an attack upon the lock.

Not rudely, but gently. He knew well it was a door built for strength, and that it would be hopeless to think of forcing it, and that if it was to be got open it would be by coaxing.

His patience was put to a severe trial.

Originally no doubt the lock was made as unpickable as possible, but now, having been left to itself so long, it had got thoroughly rusted into its setting, so that, even if he had had the proper key, it would have been a matter of some difficulty to turn it in the wards.

But this opposition to his wishes only served to make him more determined.

He had to pause more than once.

At last the bolt of the lock was bit by bit forced back.

But the door did not open.

It seemed to be fastened into its frame.

There was, however, near the centre of it, a large octagonal-shaped knob, and this Dick caught hold of and pulled with all his might.

The door shook slightly.

He tried again.

Tom King lent his aid by clasping him round the waist.

Slowly, with a harsh grating sound, the door opened.

But only while they pulled with their utmost strength.

When it was open about eighteen inches, something, which must have been leaning against the door, fell fluttering and rattling into the apartment.

It lay on the floor in an unshapely huddled-up mass.

The dust rose up in clouds.

Instinctively, the two highwaymen sprang back and retreated until they were brought to a stop by the huge bedstead.

Tom King was startled, and so was Turpin, but not to anything like the same extent as his companion.

Neither, however, moved or spoke until the dust had to some extent subsided.

"What—what is it?" gasped Tom. "What is it?"

We must approach to know that, though I more than suspect what it is. Stay, the light in the room seems to be fading. Can it be possible that the day has gone?"

"It would seem so; but do not dally! Quick! Light your lantern. We shall then be able to see better."

"I was thinking of doing so," said Turpin, producing it from his pocket, and igniting the small wick within it by means of a phosphorous match.

In another moment now a clear beam of light streamed through the crystalline lens.

Our friends then made their way towards the strong iron door, directing the ray of light upon the object which had fallen forth.

A cry of horror came from Tom King's lips.

What had fallen were the mouldering, festering remains of a human body.

The bones, which could be seen here and there, were bleached and bare, and the clothing that lay about and around them seemed to be of no greater consistency than tinder.

But their first natural shock of terror and disgust at meeting with such an object over, the curiosity of the two highwaymen resumed its sway.

By Dick's advice, the strong door was pulled as far open as it would come.

They then stood on one side, so that the charnel-like odour which filled the closet might mingle with the purer atmosphere in the large apartment.

Then, with slow steps, they walked to the spot where the human remains were lying.

"See," said Dick, "here is that which explains all."

"It does; but look, do you perceive, my friend, there is more than one body here."

"I am aware of it; I felt sure there was!"

"I can distinguish several portions of a woman's dress, and here and there the bright brass buttons belonging to a naval uniform."

"It is even so. You see how I was right when I said Sir Ernest's wife never eloped. Here is the proof, for that this is all that remains of the unhappy Kate there can scarcely exist a doubt."

"And of her old lover, Ralph Anderdon."

"And of her old lover, Ralph Anderdon, as you say. The vengeance of Sir Ernest was complete. Here is the key to the desertion of the mansion. He calculated that in a hundred years all traces of his crime would have disappeared, and so the name would remain untarnished. I somehow saw through it all at a glance. I can tell what occurred almost as well as if I had been here to witness it."

"It is not difficult to do so now."

"No, nor was it to me from the first. You may depend Sir Ernest Dane surprised his wife and Ralph Anderdon here together. He then, by some means, contrived to put an end to their existence, probably by poison, and then locked them in this strong room."

"That, I think, with all due deference to you, can hardly have been the actual cause of affairs."

"Why not?"

"You seem to overlook the circumstance that they were both leaning against the door; they could not else have fallen out as they did."

"True."

"That, then, I take it, clearly indicate that they were put in there alive, and that they died leaning against the door, perhaps in the hope of releasing themselves from their place of confinement."

"Yes, you must be right in that respect, but it makes Sir Ernest's crime ten times more horrible. They must have starved to death!"

"Or, which is more likely, perished for want of air."

"Or the two causes combined. Sir Ernest, however, displayed some ingenuity. There was no bungling in his work."

"None. At least, to all appearance."

"So probable a story that his wife had eloped with her former lover would, of course, be easily believed by those who were acquainted with the history of her life and young affections."

"It was believed implicitly, and I think you are the very first that ever expressed a doubt upon the subject; at least, that I have ever heard of."

"Some intuitive feeling caused me to do so."

"The circumstances altogether are most strange!"

"Most strange, indeed!"

"It is a sad sight. Beautiful as I have heard Kate was, there are no traces of her beauty now."

"But can you wonder that Sir Ernest should wander spectre-like about the house, and that he should dread

always to be alone? In this gloomy place, and with the weight of his fearful crime pressing upon him, it is no wonder he became 'the living personification of conscience-stricken man!'"

"My very words!"

Dick smiled.

"Never," he said, "to the longest day of my existence, will be obliterated from my mind all that I have seen and heard respecting Durley Chine!"

"I can readily believe that."

"Poor girl!" said Turpin, looking down at the grisly bones lying at his feet. "She is greatly to be pitied—far more to be pitied than blamed—though that she was guilty I think there is conclusive evidence."

"Her punishment was great."

"You are right there. No one, unless those who have actually experienced it can tell how horrible it is to die from want of food."

"And this young sailor. His career was a short one, and its termination inglorious. He is more guilty than Kate, but it is very, very easy to forgive him!"

"He had a consolation, and he may perhaps have considered it a great one, that of dying with her he loved, for it is probable that one did not long survive the other."

The more our friends pondered upon the lovers' unhappy fate, the more deeply they felt moved.

Both were for some minutes silent.

All that had happened in that old mansion was perfectly apparent, and the thoughts of each were busy in running over the several details.

"Come, Dick," said Tom King, first breaking the silence. "We shall do no good now by staying longer in this place. Come!"

With an effort, Turpin roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen.

A deep, long-drawn sigh came from his lips.

"Yes, Tom, my friend, we will go, but I fancy that what we have just seen will furnish us with the material for many an hour's conversation."

"Yes, unquestionably it will; but, come, do not let us stay here any longer!"

"I will but take one more glance around me," said Turpin. "Here is the place behind the door which we have barely looked at."

Turpin accordingly raised his lantern and cast its beams into the strong room.

Walls, roof, and floor presented one uniform smooth level surface, and were apparently of iron.

It was perfectly empty, and not more than four feet square.

"That is all," said Turpin. "But what are we to do? Leave the place just as it is?"

"There is no help for it. Come along! I am already sick and faint beyond endurance! Come!"

Slowly and reluctantly Dick left the apartment, but some strange fascination made him gaze about him until the last moment.

CHAPTER LVIII.

IT TURNS OUT THAT OUR FRIENDS ARE NOT THE SOLE INHABITANTS OF DURLEY CHINE.

THE air in the corridor seemed by comparison a thousand times purer and sweeter than it was, and Tom drew several long breaths, so as to expel all the miasma his lungs had absorbed while gazing on the frightful spectacle in Sir Ernest's room.

It was quite dark now, and the lantern which Turpin had was of great service.

"What is to be done next, Dick? I can scarcely believe that time has slipped away so fast, but positively nothing seems to be closing in."

"It does," said Turpin, consulting the chronometer, which he had taken from Captain Nidget, "and it is, too! Why, would you credit it? it is close upon seven!"

"Well, what are we to do, Dick? There is little more, I fancy, to be seen worth seeing in the mansion."

"No, perhaps not. I think, however, that considering all things, it will be much more to our safety if we remain hidden here for twenty-four hours longer."

"I don't dispute that in the least, but in the meanwhile just let me ask you what we are to do for food during that time?"

"It is some time since we had any last!"

"I am painfully aware of that. I have before now more than once had to fast for a lengthened period, but I never went so long before, and never felt so hungry as I do now!"

"Nor I; and it is quite certain, Tom, that if we are to stay here we must have something to live on; but how to get it is the question!"

"I think, considering the length of time the place has been shut up, there is very little likelihood of our finding anything in it at all comestible."

"None at all, I should say. The only thing is, if we chose to go groping about in the cellars, we might find a bottle or two of choice wine."

"We must have something to eat first. However, let us go first to the room where we passed the night."

"Agreed!" said Tom, and they both descended the stairs, and in a minute or two more were standing at the door of the room.

It will be recollected they fastened it when they quitted it in the morning.

Dick unlocked it, and they entered.

"Look here, Tom, I'll tell you what I will do. Just clear my clothes from dust as well as you can, so that my appearance will not excite suspicion, and I will, as it is now quite dark, go out and see if I cannot get something at the nearest village."

"But with me, of course?"

"No, I think it will be better if you stay here. Alone I shall not be so likely to excite suspicion. Do not let us waste time by parleying about the matter. I want to go at once."

"Then I hope, since you have made up your mind to that effect, that you will not be any longer gone than you can possibly help."

"You may rest quite easy on that score. I shan't. While I am gone, however, do you light a fire, and so forth, so that there may be no time lost when I arrive with the provisions."

"Trust to me for that. But shall you not disguise yourself at all?"

"How can I?" Besides, I think it hardly necessary. It is not likely there is any one here who knows me, or, at all events, who would be able to recognise me, in the dark; so that I run little or no risk."

"Still, be most careful."

"I will."

"Above all, take the greatest care that no one sees you leave the grounds, for if they do so the country will be roused immediately."

"Don't let that trouble you. Now, shall I do?"

While they had been speaking, Tom had been busily engaged in cleansing the dust and cobwebs from his friend's apparel.

"Yes. Be off with you, and don't be long, and above all, do not excite suspicion by either word or action!"

"All right. Mind you have the fire alight when I come back. Good bye!"

"Good bye, Dick," said Tom, as he assisted him through the small hall window.

Turpin sprang upon the doorstep, and then ran lightly down the crumbling person on to the lawn.

Tom King followed him with his eyes as long as he could, but Dick was soon lost in the gloom of the evening.

"I only hope he will come safe back," said Tom, as he returned to their room and prepared to make a fire. "I wish now I had insisted upon going with him, and yet, perhaps, it is best as it is. I will try to think so, at all events!"

That was very good philosophy upon Tom's part, and leaving him to follow it, we will turn our attention to Dick Turpin.

No sooner had he plunged among the trees on the lawn, than he heard a faint whinnying sound, and the rush of horse's footsteps.

"That is Bess," he said, and in another minute the sagacious creature was rubbing her head against his shoulder.

Dick caressed her gently.

He knew that was the best way to soothe her.

Then taking the bridle in his hand, he again led her to the shrubbery, and tethered her to a tree.

This done, he hurried rapidly away.

His mare cast after him that melancholy gaze so often

to be observed in a horse or a dog who is more than usually devoted to his master.

Making as little noise as possible, Dick recrossed the lawn, and made his way down the carriage-drive to the entrance gate.

Here he paused, and listened with intentness that soon became painful.

But all was still.

No approaching or receding footstep disturbed the solitude of that place.

Dim, ghastly, gaunt, and half-confused with the dark shadows of the trees, stood Sir Ernest's monument.

Dick waited full five minutes before he ventured to stir.

Then feeling confident there was no one at hand, he picked the lock in the gate and passed through, taking care to lock it again after him.

He crouched down in the shadow of the buttresses, and again waited.

His caution was scarcely necessary.

So evil a name had Durley Chine got among the inhabitants of that district, that not one of them would have ventured anywhere in its vicinity after dark, even if they were offered untold wealth for doing so.

Feeling certain that he was the only living human being near that spot, Dick stepped out boldly into the road or lane, whichever it might be called.

Then a very interesting question arose in his mind.

To reach some place where he could purchase the things he required, should he turn to the right or the left?

He paused and considered, and then, remembering that he had come with his companion some distance along the road to the right, and that they had not seen anything like a human habitation, he made up his mind to turn to the left.

It was a lucky thing that he chose the way he did. In less than a quarter of an hour he reached a small hamlet.

What was the name of it he had not the remotest idea.

The inhabitants seemed all to be indoors.

Dick passed as quietly and stealthily as he could along the little straggling village street.

Presently he came to an alehouse.

He hesitated a moment, and thought of attempting to get there what he required, but, fearful of raising suspicion, he turned away.

He was looking for one of those miscellaneous shops which are to be found in most villages, where every description of goods can be purchased.

"Surely," he thought, "this village will not be an exception to all others, and be without one?"

He began to think so, for he had passed completely through it when he saw a light shining from a window a little in advance.

Hoping it would prove to be the place he wanted, he quickened his steps.

He reached it in two minutes.

Yes; there was the small latticed window crammed with goods of every description, chalky-looking sweetmeats in blue bottles preponderating, which invariably distinguish the village hucksters.

Dick drew close to the window and tried to peep in, but the things were stacked so closely together that he found it impossible to obtain a glimpse even of the interior.

Then a fresh difficulty arose in his mind.

Would it not seem strange for a person of Dick's appearance to walk into a shop and purchase bread and such like necessaries?

Of course it would.

Curiosity would be at once aroused.

Dick hesitated.

He palled the ends of his moustachios.

"It's lucky," he muttered, "that I happened to think of it before I went in. If I hadn't I should have made a mess of it! Something must be done! Let me see! Oh! ah! that will do!"

Dick had hit upon a scheme.

He lifted the latch of the shop door.

As he opened it a bell rang furiously.

In obedience to the summons, a tall, thin, shrivelled old woman entered the shop.

"What is it?" she asked, in an unceremonious voice.

Dick put on an air of immense importance, and spoke in a pompous sort of way.

"The woman became obsequious instantly. She thought Dick was a lord at the very least.

"My good lady!" he said, "I want you to assist me. I was walking homewards when I heard cries of distress, and in a little shed that had only three sides to keep out the cold, I found a poor family actually starving."

"Yes, sir—my lord, I mean!" said the woman, confusedly.

"Address me by the first title, if you please," said Dick, in a manner that made the woman more and more convinced the second was the one belonging to him. "I found this family, ten of them in all, actually dying of hunger—dying of hunger!"

"Lor! a massay, sir! You don't say so!"

"It is true! For the shame of England, it is true. They were all so far gone that not one was strong enough to come here and get some food, so I determined to come myself, and take it myself. I never do good actions by halves. So just put what articles you think proper into a basket so that I may carry them conveniently, and I will pay you liberally for the whole!"

CHAPTER LXI.

TOM KING IS MUCH ALARMED BY HEARING A MYSTERIOUS VOICE IN THE OLD MANSION.

"Yes, sir, I am sure your lordship is very good. It is not many that would do as you've done! I s'pose, though, you are a stranger in these parts. Excuse, me, my lord, for venturing to say so much."

The woman bustled about and procured a wicker basket as she spoke, into which she stowed some bread, butter, tea, eggs, and such like.

"Yes, I am a visitor here."

"I thought so, sir. At Lord Wingfield's, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Dick, who no more knew who Lord Wingfield was, than the man in the moon, but conjectured he was some nobleman who had a residential estate in the neighbourhood. "I have come down to my cousin's for a short visit."

"Oh! indeed, my lord. I didn't know Lord Wingfield had a cousin, but of course now he must have!"

"How much will they all come to, my good woman? I am anxious to get back. They will wonder what has become of me, for I only went out for a stroll after dinner!"

"Well, sir, your lordship, I mean," said the old woman, who was rather at a loss how to appraise her goods, but thought she ought to avail herself of this opportunity to get profit. "Altogether, basket and all, they comes to seven—yes, eight-and-sixpence."

She would have sold the same articles to one of her ordinary customers for half-a-crown.

"Very good," said Dick, "here's half-a-guinea. You need not trouble about the change."

If the old woman had had any doubts about Dick being a lord, they were completely dissipated after that one politic speech.

"Your lordship's very good—very good," she said, regretting that she had not asked more. "I am sorry, but I am a lone woman, and there is no one I can send to carry the basket for you."

"And a deuced good job, too," muttered Dick to himself, "for such a thing would have been very embarrassing."

"There's my neighbour's little boy, Josiah, would have been glad to carry the basket for your lordship. It seems ridiculous for you to have to do it."

"Not at all, not at all," said Dick, placing the handle of the basket. "There's no false pride about me, and I am never ashamed of being seen doing a good action."

"Ah! my lord, them's the sentiments I should like all lords to have. Old England would be very different to what it is."

"It would—it would!"

"Allow me to open the door for your lordship," said the woman, rushing hastily round the counter, and bringing down an avalanche of bottles in her course. "Allow me."

Dick stood aside, and permitted the old woman to open the door.

"Good night, my good woman, good night."

"Good night, your lordship!" repeated the woman, cursing to the gods that she should have

lived to see the day that I should have waited on a real lord, and Lord Wingfield's cousin, too, and then to see him carry the things away on his own noble arm! Oh! it eludes bangs all, that it do!"

Dick Turpin hurried off along the village street, and was so fortunate as not to meet a soul.

His ruse tickled his fancy mightily.

But it had taken more time to obtain the provisions than he had calculated upon, and he knew that Tom would be losing all patience, if not getting positively uneasy about his safety.

So when Dick reached the lane leading to the gates of Durley Chine, he set off at a trot, which, though apparently not calling forth any particular exertion enabled him to get over a good deal of ground in a short time.

Very soon he had the satisfaction of seeing the iron gates before him.

He unlocked them and entered, carefully relooking them behind him.

Then, noticing that the long grass had the appearance of having been trampled upon, he spent a few moments in restoring it to a perpendicular position.

In this he succeeded very well.

Running along the carriage drive he soon emerged upon the lawn, which he crossed without relaxing his speed, and then bounded up the steps.

Tom he found was standing at the window watching for him.

"Success!" said Dick, handing him the basket; "there's enough there to keep us nearly a week."

But Tom took the basket in perfect silence, and then, holding up his hand, he said impressively—

"Hush!"

Dick was astonished.

"What is the matter?"

"Hush!" said Tom, more earnestly than before.

"Oh! I see how it is," said Dick to himself. "He has gone too long without food, and his wound has made him slightly delirious!"

This was a natural enough supposition, and certainly Tom's behaviour was sufficient to induce it, for what earthly motive could he have for saying, "Hush!" in so mysterious a manner?

Dick put his foot on the balustrade, and crawled through the window.

As soon as he stood in the hall, he felt Tom clutch him tightly by the arm, and whisper—

"Hush!"

Dick began to feel alarmed.

"Hang it all, Tom, what the deuce is the matter?" he said. "Speak out, what is it?"

Tom did not reply, but drew him into the room which they had occupied on the previous night, and closed the door cautiously behind him.

In obedience to his promise, Tom had made a fire.

It was burning brightly, and diffused a pleasant light. Dick looked anxiously at his companion's countenance.

Tom was pale.

There was, too, something like a scared look about his eyes.

Dick was more and more bewildered.

"For heaven's sake, Tom, my friend," he said, "speak! put me out of my suspense by telling me what has happened to cause this great change in your behaviour!"

Tom came forward.

"Keep your distance!" said his companion, retreating as he advanced. "You look just a little mad!"

"I do feel strangely!" said Tom; "but, Dick, so sure as you and I are present here in this apartment, so surely are there other inhabitants of Durley Chine beside ourselves!"

"Pho—pho!" said Dick, drawing a long breath, "and is that all? Here help me with the supper, and let's have something to eat!"

"Do not disregard or disbelieve what I tell you. I am convinced that what I say is true!"

"Very well. I don't say it isn't," said Dick, who thought it would be best to humour him. "But before I listen to what you have to say further, I must have something to eat!"

Accordingly Dick commenced transferring the contents of the basket to the table.

The craving of hunger was strong in Tom's breast, and the sight of the phai yet tempting viands made him forget all else.

For the next ten minutes both were perfectly silent. By the end of that time, however, their appetite having been appeased, Dick spoke—

"It was quite time you did have something eatable, Tom," he said, "for I do believe if you had gone much longer without, you would have clean lost your senses. I am sure you were a little mad when you stood at the window and said 'Hush!' in the fashion you did!"

"Perhaps so—perhaps so! My wound—fasting for so long—and the day of excitement we have had, may have caused my senses to play me false."

"I should think such a result was very probable."

"And yet," said Tom, "surely I cannot have made so great a mistake. Listen!"

"He got up as he spoke and opened the door a little.

Then he assumed an attitude of intense listening.

"I can hear nothing," said Dick, "except the sighing and murmuring of the wind in the deserted corridors. Do you?"

"Not now," said Tom. "But let the door remain as it is, just a little way ajar."

"Very well. You are on the side to feel the draught, not I!"

"I do not care for it," said Tom, resuming his seat; "and now I will try to tell you what I heard after you left me."

"Do so."

"I stood at the hall window watching you until I could see you no longer. Then I returned to this room, broke up a couple more chairs, and lighted the fire."

"Yes, what then?"

"This, of course, took up some little time, but still I thought it almost time you were back. I felt dreadfully sick and faint for want of food. My wound smarted horribly, and I continually saw bright moving figures, sometimes like stars and sometimes like faces, fitting before my eyes."

"Those symptoms are easily accounted for."

"I am aware of it! Well, I sat here in the chair for what seemed to me to be an endless time, and then I got up and staggered to the little window in the hall. I say staggered, because I found my legs had scarcely strength enough to support the weight of my body!"

"Well—well, go on! What next?" said Dick; "for goodness sake don't be so prolix!"

"So what?"

"Oh! hang it all, don't beat about the bush so much. Come to the point."

"I was at it, and should have told you by now if you hadn't interrupted me. Don't be so impatient!"

"Go on! Go on!"

"You may laugh at what I say as much as you like, but I'm confident it's true for all that, and that if I was exhausted from want of food, that my senses played me no trick. While I was standing at the hall window waiting and watching for you to make your appearance, I distinctly heard a voice."

"A voice?"

"Yes, a voice."

"What words did it utter?"

"I could not distinguish the words. It was a voice alone I heard."

"Nonsense, Tom, you must have been mistaken. Who is there here besides ourselves possessing the faculty of speech?"

"That I cannot say," said Tom, "but I am as confident as I am of my own existence at the present moment, that while I was at the window in the hall I heard the sound of a voice, if not voices, and that is why I said 'Hush!' as soon as you appeared, for I thought it only natural that, if I heard someone speak, that someone would hear us speak also!"

CHAPTER LX.

THE TWO FRIENDS PROBE YET DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERIES OF DUMLEY CHINE, AND GET TAKEN PRISONERS FOR THEIR FAITH.

DECK TURPIN looked narrowly into Tom King's face as he spoke, and saw at once that his comrade was fully convinced of the truth of what he had uttered.

That there was anything supernatural about it, Dick would not for one moment believe.

He could not yet divest himself of the idea that it was Tom's fancy.

Yet it might not be, and it most certainly behoved him for his own safety's sake to act with as much precaution as possible.

"You do not credit me," said Tom, "but it is true for all that! Now what voice could it have been?"

"How should I be able to tell any more than yourself? Now pray, Tom, recollect how startled—I might say frightened—we both were this morning at hearing that awful shrieking sound, and yet how simple was the cause that produced it!"

"I know it was," said Tom King; "but I could credit the wind making such a sound as that, but not imitating a human voice. There is something about that, I take it, that makes it impossible for anything to imitate it."

"True!" said Dick, uneasily. "True! We ought not to dismiss such a thing as this without further consideration, even if we could."

"And that I very much doubt," said Tom. "But come, my friend, I am refreshed. My brain is clear. What are we to do?"

"That is very hard indeed to say!"

"It is."

"If we could only hear the sound again, we should have something like a foundation to go upon!"

"I am aware of that, and that is why I put the door open just now, in order that we might hear what was taking place outside with greater plainness."

"Exactly! We will listen! And now, Tom, assuming that your hearing did not deceive you—and setting aside all thoughts of supernatural agency—from whose lips, think you, was it likely the sound came?"

"There you puzzle me, I cannot form the least idea. The place has been so long closed up, and when we came we found no traces of any one having made an entrance before us."

"That we certainly did not!"

"And I think we may say, with greater safety still, that no one has entered during the time we have been here."

"We have not heard any one, and surely no one could have got in without our doing so."

"Certainly not."

"Who can it be then?"

"Not a friend!"

"No—more likely an enemy! Yet stay, Tom. Do you think there is a probability of our being tracked hither by the police, and that they have found some means of entering the place so distant from this as for us not to hear it?"

"I am bewildered, and know not what to think!" said Tom, springing from his seat, and pacing up and down the room.

"So am I; but it will never do to remain so. We must make up our minds to a certain course of action, and that at once."

"What do you advise?"

"I must think what will be best. You know, in nearly all cases, I am in favour of a bold course of action!"

"It is generally best."

"Shall we adopt it in the present case? Say the word. I consent!"

"I think it will be best," said Turpin. "Come along, Tom! Look to your weapons carefully, and we will soon see from whence this mysterious voice came!"

As he spoke, Dick, with an air of great resolution, now that he had made up his mind what he was going to do, rose from his seat, re-primed his pistols, took up his lantern and crow-bar, and closely followed by Tom King, left the room, and entered the hall.

Turpin had taken the precaution to turn the dark slide of his lanterns, so that, not the faintest ray of light proceeded from it.

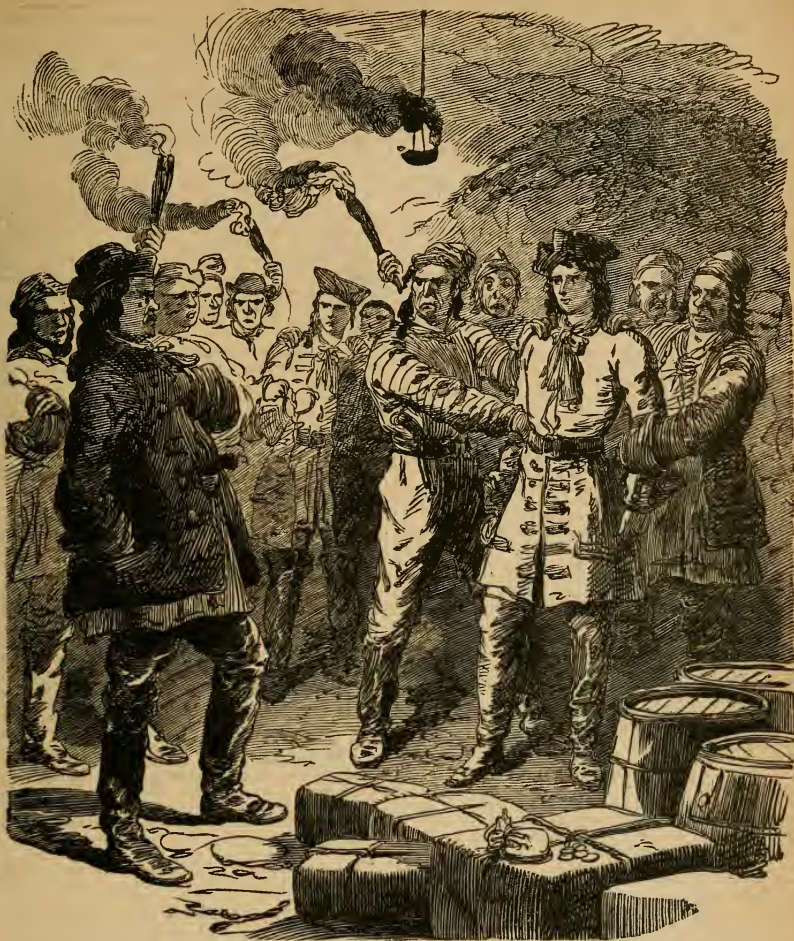
Tom King gently closed the door.

They stood then surrounded by a darkness and a silence that were positively dreadful.

Without making the least sound our friends crept along the hall.

As soon as they reached the extremity both paused and listened.

When Tom heard the voice he was too much stu-



[DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE BROUGHT BEFORE THE SMUGGLER CHIEF.]

to take particular heed of the exact direction from whence it came. It was somewhere in the mansion, he felt confident.

Therefore, unless they should hear it again, they would have nothing to guide them.

Not half a yard from where they stood was a flight of steps leading to the lower portion of the building.

Dick touched Tom lightly on the arm and whispered:

"Shall we go down here and see if there is anything to rouse suspicion?"

"Yes, by all means; I feel it would be impossible to rest until this affair is thoroughly sifted."

"I should not exactly be at ease. I fancy there is little likelihood of anyone being above, considering we explored that part of the place!"

"You may depend the voice ascended these steps," said Tom, "for although everything has been so silent ever since, I am still firmly convinced that I did hear a voice!"

"Very well, my friend, follow me, and we shall soon know whether you were right or not."

So saying, Turpin fearlessly descended the stairs.

Still he did not go rashly, for he knew not how sure his footing might be; but the bright rays of the lamp showed him that all was well.

On reaching the bottom of the stairs they saw before and on each side of them several doors. These were tried one after another, and found fast locked.

Dick turned round to his companion with a smile upon his lips.

"There is nothing here, you see, or, at all events, everything has the appearance of not having been disturbed. I am sure it was your fancy, Tom! Do you feel inclined to prosecute your search any further?"

"I do," said Tom, who was vexed to think Dick should be so sure he was mistaken. "Here are some more steps. Let us go down them!"

"With all pleasure imaginable. These lead to the cellars, I should think. Perhaps we may be lucky enough to fall across some wine, which would be very acceptable just now!"

The stairs certainly did have the appearance of leading to the cellars.

They were of rough bricks, and so were the walls.

Both were covered with humid exhalations.

It became now absolutely necessary for our friends to tread with the utmost caution, and feel one foot secure before they moved the other, for the slime on the steps was treacherous in the extreme, and there was nothing on either side that permitted a hand hold.

At length, to their great satisfaction, the bottom of the steps was reached.

The descent had occupied many minutes, for the steps were numerous. They were now on a level with the foundations of the building.

The atmosphere that entered their lungs was most impure and chill, and they breathed with difficulty.

The lantern seemed to have diminished the brilliancy of its light, or else the air itself was of a greater density than that above.

They could not see to any great distance around them, but they appeared to be standing in vaults of great extent. The flooring was quite wet.

Our friends kept on in as direct a line as they could, expecting in a short time to come to some obstacle that would prevent their further progress.

In this anticipation they walked on for a hundred yards or more.

Still there was no appearance of a termination.

Black empty space was on all sides of them.

There was another circumstance that had made itself manifest for some little time.

The ground gradually sloped lower and lower.

Dick came to a halt and flashed the lantern about him.

"I'll be hanged if I half like this place," he said. "I am cold to the bone, and we seem on the highroad to the infernal regions. What's the good of going any further? I think it is pretty clear now you made a mistake!"

"I don't see it," said Tom, obstinately. "Let us go on further. This place must have an end somewhere."

"One would think so; but I can see neither beginning nor end. However, if you are resolved, come on!"

They, therefore, once more resumed their course.

The descent became more rapid at every step.

But there were no signs either of roof, sides, or end; the only thing they could see was the ground, which was running with moisture everywhere.

Their footsteps echoed hollowly in that gloomy and sepulchral-looking place.

"I am puzzled beyond measure to think what kind of place this is."

"Are you? Well, I cannot say that I am!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes; the mansion above us is built upon a rock which overhangs the sea, and I fancy these are natural cavities in this rock which were used for cellars; and very good ones they would make!"

"Ah! just so! I don't doubt it. They are extensive enough, goodness knows!"

"They are! How far, think you, are we from the end of this place?"

"That's just what I should like to know. It seems pretty clear there is no one here but ourselves!"

"Have you anything small and heavy in your pocket—a stone, or something of that sort?"

"No, I haven't. What do you want it for?"

"Why, if one of us took a stone, or something of the kind, and threw it straight before us, we should have some idea of how far we have to go, for I have quite made up my mind not to turn back until I have seen where this leads to!"

"The deuce you have! However, I haven't a stone, but here is a bullet. I daresay that will answer the purpose just as well!"

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN HAVE SOME SINGULAR ADVENTURES IN THE VAULTS, AND ARE RATHER TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

"It will be the very thing!" replied Tom King. "Hand it here!"

Dick accordingly gave to his comrade a bullet of rather large size.

"Stand aside," said Tom, preparing to throw it. "One—two—three!"

As he uttered the word three Tom threw the bullet straight before him in the darkness with all the power he had in his arm.

They waited anxiously to hear it strike.

In the intense stillness that was around them they expected the slight sound it would make would reach their ears, even supposing the bullet fell at a considerable distance.

But they waited in vain.

Not the faintest sound arose.

"This is incomprehensible!" said Dick.

"It appears to be; but let us push forward. We must find out something very soon!"

They now resumed their course.

In a few minutes the nature of the ground changed.

Up to now it had been wet, but tolerably hard. Now it was very soft and their feet sank deeply in.

By the reflection of the lantern too they could see that here and there the water had accumulated into small pools.

Foul and noisome insects, such as damp and darkness combined never fail to generate, crawled lazily from before their feet, or plunged with a dull plash into the pools.

"This solves the mystery of our not hearing the fall of the bullet at once," said Tom King. "It would sink into this soft ooze without a sound!"

"It would. But hark! Cannot you hear faintly a strange rumbling noise! What can it be?"

"There is only one thing that can cause such a sound!"

"What is it?"

"The washing of the sea against a rocky coast."

"You are right—that is it! Come, it is possible we may find some mode of exit from Durley Chine which is either unknown or forgotten!"

And despite the disagreeable nature of the ground they pushed forward with fresh spirit.

As they advanced, the rumbling sound became plainer and plainer, until at length they could distinguish the dashing of the very waves themselves.

The path descended very rapidly.

"Hilloa!" said Dick suddenly, as looking before him he saw the beams of the lantern rested on something. "Hilloa, Tom! what have we here? This is a discovery, indeed!"

"That it certainly is! Why, they are casks without number piled up!"

"They are!"

"Shift the light a little! There, that will do! Why, they stretch out on both sides as far as we can see! Well, I never! Are they full, I wonder?"

Full of surprise at coming so unexpectedly upon a larger number of casks than they had ever seen at one time in their lives before, the two friends hurried forward to obtain a nearer view.

Yes, there was no mistake, there the casks were. They were small ones, and of the kind generally called kegs.

Dick knocked several with his knuckles.

From the dullness of the sound it was quite certain they were full of liquid of some kind or other.

"I say, Dick," said King, rather triumphantly. "Do you think I was wrong when I said I heard a voice?"

"It would be premature to say yet! There seems some degree of probability about it now!"

"Rather! Just look at the ground!"

Dick did so, and was astonished to find the impression of numberless footsteps on the soft floor of the vault.

This was confirmation indeed.

Our friends got anxious and excited.

They could feel their hearts knocking against their ribs, and their breathing became short and laboured, as is often the case when people are under more than usual circumstances of excitement.

"Some one has been here, that's very certain!"

"No one can dispute the evidence before us, I should think," said Tom King. "If my stomach was empty I was certain I heard a voice!"

"Well, it seems as if you did. Still they must have been nearer the stairs than we are now or you could never have heard them!"

"I don't doubt that for a moment!"

"I wish we had thought of looking for the traces of

steps before, but the truth is, I placed no credence in your story!"

"I know you did not, and therefore said nothing; but if you were not looking out I was, and I saw the foot-prints quite close to the bottom of the steps!"

"Then why didn't you speak?"

"Why didn't I speak?"

"Yes."

"Because I thought I would serve you out if I could, though of course if you had stoutly refused to go any further I should have told you!"

"Well—well! It appears to me we have by no means come to the end of the remarkable sights at Durlay Chine!"

"No! On the contrary. I think we shall find we are on the threshold of some new discoveries!"

"No doubt of it! But I should uncommonly like to know what there is in those casks! Have you anything you can tap one with?"

"I have not."

"Nothing that would answer the purpose?"

"No. I left an auger which I had with me on the table in the room above."

"That's a pity! However it is not worth while to go and fetch it. Let us see what more there is to be seen."

"It will be best to follow these foot-marks. They will surely lead us somewhere."

"Yes, it seems almost like a path. Come along!"

They made better progress now, for they had firmer ground to walk upon.

About two minutes brought them to a place where the path led right through the casks, which were piled up on either side like a wall.

The murmuring of the sea grew plainer and plainer.

But now another sound begun to mingle with it.

The hum of many human voices.

"Look to your pistols, Tom," said Dick, as soon as his ear detected the new sound. "Look to the priming. There must be many people here, and they are more likely to be enemies than friends!"

"Unfortunately, yes!"

"Still I fancy as we are, should any one take the aggressive, we should be a pretty good match for more than half-a-dozen!"

But scarcely had this assertion left his lips than the highwaymen emerged from the path between the casks into an open space, and before either knew what had happened the lantern was dashed violently from Dick's hand on to the ground, and both our friends felt themselves seized upon from behind by numberless hands.

They were strong hands too, and each one gripped as though he never meant to loose his hold.

Resistance was impossible.

They were completely overpowered.

At least half-a-dozen hands held them firmly by the arms.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were prisoners.

CHAPTER LXII.

FURTHER PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE CAVERNS.

So utterly unexpected was this attack, and so suddenly ended, that it was a minute or so before either of our friends had any clear idea of what had taken place.

They were soon aroused to the fact that they were captives.

But who were their captors?

That they would have given no inconsiderable trifle to know.

But all was darkness the most intense and profound.

Both could hear the heavy breathing of those who held them prisoners, and could tell to a little whereabouts they stood in consequence, but not the least bit could they see.

It was Dick who spoke first.

"Who are you that have dared to lay your hands upon us? Speak. Speak at once!"

"Ha! ha!"

That was the only reply he got to his speech.

But almost immediately a gruff voice said—

"Bring them along! Quick! I will await them in the lower cave."

"Oh, indeed!" thought Dick, "now I wonder who you are? Not a police officer certainly, so there's some consolation in that!"

There might be, but it was no great one, one would think.

Obedient the orders they had received the men who held our friends set forward.

Tom began, in spite of the wound in his shoulder, to struggle most desperately.

"Easy does it, Tom!" cried Turpin as he heard the scuffling behind him. "Give in quietly. It will soon be all right provided you don't say who we are."

The men took no notice of this. At all events they made no remark about it.

Tom ceased his efforts, and allowed himself to be hurried along in the intense darkness without the least resistance.

Their captors must have been very familiar with the place, for seeing was quite out of the question. Yet they did not make one false step.

Those who held Dick walked first.

About half-a-dozen steps behind them came the others.

Presently a voice said hoarsely in Dick's ear—

"Descend the steps! They are thirteen in number and steep!"

The same caution was given to Tom King.

The whole then passed down the steps.

Still in deep darkness.

They were hurried along another passage, at the extremity of which they could see a faint ray of light.

So faint that in any less darkness it would have been imperceptible.

Dick hailed it with pleasure.

In a few moments now would his curiosity be gratified, and he would surely know by whom he had been taken prisoner.

The ray of light increased in brightness.

The muttering of voices reached their ears.

The passage seemed a most interminable length.

But, as the longest lane must have a turning, so must the longest passage have an end, and in a few minutes, to Dick's great satisfaction, a kind of curtain was drawn aside, and he was hurried forward into what he supposed was the lower cavern.

One hasty glance around was sufficient to enable him to have a clear idea of what kind of place he was in.

But it will take us some few minutes to describe it.

Contrary to the place they had just left, this one was well lighted—at least, the contrast made it appear to be.

It was a very lofty cavern, with long graceful-looking stalactites depending from the ceiling.

In shape it was irregular, but very spacious.

The floor was hard and calcareous.

At irregular intervals round the walls, long pinewood torches were stuck in the crevices, and these diffused a ruddy light over the place, as well as marked out its extent.

Near the centre a group of about a dozen men were congregated.

Several of these held torches above their heads.

Our friends saw at once into whose hands they had fallen.

Smugglers.

There could be no question of it.

No doubt there was some little unknown creek which led from the sea into that cavern.

The vaults under Durlay Chine were made the receptacle of the smuggled goods, where they were housed for whatever time they thought proper.

Many things lying about showed that they had only just completed a large and valuable run.

The casks which our friends had seen had not been there above twenty-four hours.

The semi-nautical garb which the men wore, and the circumstances by which they were surrounded, betrayed at once their occupation.

These things were noted by our friends as they were led across the cavern to where the group we have been speaking of were standing.

Among these was one whose gigantic athletic form and authoritative air pointed him out as the chief of the lawless gang.

As our friends approached, the little group dispersed to the right and left, so that they stood face to face with the captain.

By his command the torches were so held as to cast their full light upon the prisoners, who were still held tight by the arms by those who had secured them.

The smuggler chief—or king, as he delighted to be called—surveyed the highwaymen with undisguised surprise.

"Capsive me in a squall!" he ejaculated. "What strange fish have we here? They don't belong to the coast-guard, I'll be sworn!"

We have before had occasion to state that the dress worn by Dick Turpin and Tom King was a kind of undress military uniform, and such as was worn by cavalry officers when off duty.

But this attire was by no means confined to persons in the army. Many of the young lords and beans about town clothed themselves in a similar manner.

A hundred years ago or so, the difference of rank, station, and occupation was more easily distinguished by the dress than they are at the present day.

Now it is difficult, with respect to dress merely, to tell a peer of the realm from a clerk in a lawyer's office.

Then it was quite different.

The smuggler chief therefore saw immediately that the persons he had taken prisoners were not revenue officers, as he had no doubt fancied they were, but perhaps gentlemen of birth, fortune, and position.

His bearing and manners, therefore, were comparatively civil.

While this scrutiny was going on, both the highwaymen were occupied with the same thought.

Should they make themselves known?

Dick looked at his comrade.

He saw at once that he was considering the same thought as himself.

Dick shook his head slightly, with a motion that no one would have noticed.

But Tom saw and understood it.

They were to keep their identity a secret.

This took place just as the smuggler chief finished speaking.

Dick considered it a favourable moment for him to make some remark.

He therefore fixed his eyes boldly upon the smuggler's countenance, and said, with an air of most perfect calmness and hauteur—

"My friend and myself are waiting for some explanation, which I suppose must come from you, as you appear to be in command. Why are we made prisoners, thus?"

Dick's tone and bearing produced upon the smugglers just the effect he desired and intended it should.

Tom King sustained the character of an injured gentleman to perfection!

"Yes," he said, as soon as the words were out of Turpin's mouth. "I wish to have an explanation of your conduct in dragging me here like this."

The smuggler chief felt convinced they were of the blood royal itself.

"We are sorry you should have been found spying about our warehouse. You know our secret. Our secret is our lives. Therefore you must die!"

"Nonsense," said Dick. "Not till our time comes! Let us be released, we wish to speak a word or two to you in private."

The smuggler reflected a minute, but then feeling sure he had his prisoners quite safe beyond all hope of escape, he made a sign with his hand to the men who released the highwaymen at once.

"Follow me," said the chief.

With an assumption of great dignity, our friends marched behind him.

The remaining smugglers, who had every confidence in their chief, troubled themselves no more about the strangers.

At the far side of the cavern the chief paused, and drawing aside a curtain, motioned the two friends to enter.

They, seeing that they stood upon the threshold of an apartment luxuriously furnished with articles of foreign manufacture, did not hesitate to obey.

This room was lighted with three large lamps, and a bright fire was burning on the hearth.

The chief entered, and, with the manner of one who feels he is at home, sauntered across the room, and flung himself upon a large silken ottoman.

Our wou' have thought, by their manner, they had

lived there all their lives, and so far from being strangers and prisoners, intimate friends of the chief, for both Turpin and King swaggered up to two chairs, which they very coolly carried to the vicinity of the fire, and where they could see what expression the smuggler's face wore.

Then they seated themselves.

Turpin crossed one leg over the other, and leaned back in the chair in a negligent posture, while he twirled the ends of his fine mustaches with a grace that was quite perfect.

As for Tom King, he was determined not to be behind-hand with his comrade.

Observing an iron bar upon the hearth, he took it up and arranged the fire with it to his satisfaction.

Then he took hold of his chair and sat down in it, with his legs astride the seat, and his hands leaning upon the back.

On these he rested his chin.

The smuggler king neither moved nor spoke, but sat gazing at the highwaymen with the most unbounded surprise.

The coolness of their behaviour, when so environed with peril as they were, quite staggered him.

But he was a brave man, and, like almost any one who is truly brave, admired and appreciated bravery in others.

He admired their slim and well-knit figures, and made a mental estimate of the amount of strength possessed by each.

And now, to his surprise, the smuggler king felt himself embarrassed.

The time had come for him to speak, and he knew not what to say.

Dick and Tom waited quietly.

The smuggler settled himself in an attitude upon the ottoman.

"A-hem!" he said.

Our friends took no notice.

They enjoyed the scene mightily.

They were amused to think what a difference their putting on the calm resolute bearing they did made.

But the smuggler felt his embarrassment, so far from diminishing, increased.

The longer he waited the worse he was.

He resolved to make a bold plunge.

"Gentlemen!"

He spoke in quite a deferential and subdued tone of voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I can see, without looking twice, that you are persons of high birth; I can also see, which gratifies me much more, that you are a couple of singularly brave men. Your behaviour here sufficiently proves that."

The chief paused.

Our friends waved their hands deprecatingly as he uttered his compliments on their prowess, and at the same time in a manner which meant "Go on."

"But," said the smuggler, seriously, "you were found under very suspicious circumstances—excuse me for saying as much. Never mind; I saw you were gentlemen, and I treated you as such!"

It was pretty clear the chief expected that this speech would call forth some sort of reply.

He was disappointed.

His guests contented themselves with simply bowing carelessly, as if in assent to his proposition.

"I say, gentlemen, you were both found under very suspicious circumstances. You were prying about our storehouse. You discovered our secret, and that the vaults below the deserted mansion of Durlay Chine were made the receptacle of smuggled goods. I say you have found out all this. Now a code of laws has been framed by which we all act, and from which we never deviate. In that code of rules it is expressly stated that, should any person discover the secret, they should have the choice of two alternatives—it being at my option whether the alternatives are given—to submit to be put to death, or else become members of the band."

The smuggler chief, as he finished this very long speech, wiped the perspiration from his face with a French silk pocket-handkerchief, and waited with great eagerness and anxiety for our friends to make some reply.

CHAPTER LXIII.

PERILS AND DANGERS THROCKEN ABOUT OUR FRIENDS.

To the surprise, then, no loss of the smuggler chief than Tom King, Dick Turpin put on an appearance of great candour as he spoke to the following effect.

"I have nothing to complain of in the way of treatment, and I am sure I can answer for my friend; but if you will listen I will give you some explanation of our presence among your goods."

"I shall only be too glad to pay the greatest attention to what you have to say, gentlemen. But first help yourself to a glass or two of wine."

The highwaymen accepted his invitation.

"You must know, in the first place," said Dick, re-seating himself, while Tom looked wonderingly at him to know what he was going to say, "you must know, in the first place, although we do not want it mentioned, we are of very high rank, indeed. That is to say, our fathers are, which is much the same thing."

"Exactly!" said the smuggler, with a gratified smile at his own perspicacity. "I could see at once that you were gentlemen—real gentlemen!"

Both highwaymen perpetrated two very deep bows.

Dick resumed.

"At present I cannot inform you of our precise rank and station, for obvious reasons!"

"Ahem!" coughed Tom, but Dick went on without taking the least notice of the interruption.

"But you, as a man of discernment, must be well aware that not one young man in a thousand manages to live in London upon the allowance which is made him."

"That's very true," said the smuggler, sententiously.

"Dice, wine, and women is the very devil!"

"Well, a day or two back—mind I am telling you this in confidence!"

"Yes—yes!"

"Well, a day or two back we found ourselves literally penniless, and what to do we knew not. We had exhausted every resource, and were driven to our wits' end. At length my companion mentioned Durley Chine to me."

"Ah!"

"Yes. He told me the strange story about it being shut up and so forth, which I daresay you know very well!"

"I do!"

"Well, he suggested that we should make our way down here secretly, enter the mansion by stealth, and then see if we could not find some valuables to take away with us. My friend here said there was every reason to believe there was a large sum in gold, jewels, plate, and such like scattered about the mansion."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh?"

"Excuse me, I beg! Go on, sir, if you please."

"Well, I thought the suggestion good, and down we came. We got in unperceived, and began our search for the valuables."

"Ha! ha! ha! What did you find?"

Dick stroked his moustache.

"Why," he said, "we had a great deal of trouble, but found nothing!"

"I thought not!"

"You—you thought not?"

"Yes!"

"May I ask why?"

"Oh! certainly. I paid the place a visit myself about—let me see—twelve years ago, and carried off everything that was of value!"

"Ha! I see! That's why you laughed?"

"It is."

"But, since you yourself thought well of it, you must give us credit for having hit upon a good idea!"

A complacent smile stole over the smuggler's face.

His vanity was tickled.

"Yes," he said. "But finish, pray, though it is scarcely necessary."

"It is not! However, after searching every room, we came to the stairs leading to the vaults, and the idea then very naturally occurred to us of descending and searching them also as a kind of forlorn hope!"

"Just so! And while you were thus occupied my men, thinking you spies, made you prisoners."

"That's it! So now you are in possession of all the facts, what do you intend to do?"

The smuggler reflected.

Dick's story was so natural and circumstantial, that he never for one moment thought it fictitious in the least particular.

Tom King was exceedingly pleased with his companion's inventive genius, which so far had helped them out of what at first appeared an insuperable difficulty.

But, although they did not suffer the ghost of such a thing to appear upon their countenances, we, as faithful historians, must inform the reader that they waited with great anxiety for the smuggler chief to speak.

"Well, gentlemen!" he said, at last, "it appears to me now that your being taken prisoners by my crew will turn out a very lucky thing for you!"

"I shall be very glad if it does," said Dick.

"It is quite clear your expedition to Durley Chine would have been a futile one, for I give you my word that there is nothing in the vaults that was worth your carrying away. But, as you seem to have the right spirit in you—brave, and all that sort of thing—in want of money, and not over particular how you get it, why the very best thing you can do is to join our band for a time! What do you say?"

This was what Dick had hoped for.

But he pretended the proposition came quite unexpectedly upon him, and he asked for a few minutes to consider upon it.

"Oh, certainly!" replied the smuggler, rising from his seat. "Take as long as you like. Talk it over between yourselves, for it is necessary I should run down to the beach for half-an-hour. I will leave you here as you are, if you will give me your words of honour not to attempt to escape!"

"Willingly," said both our friends in one breath, as they, too, rose. "We give you our words that we will make no attempt at escape."

"Very well, gentlemen! That is all I require," said the chief. "You may depend the best thing you can do will be to accept my offer!"

So saying, the chief pushed aside the curtain, and passing into the outer cavern, left our friends alone.

Neither, however, uttered a syllable for some moments. They were on their guard.

Dick drew Tom into the centre of the room, and spoke to him in a whisper so faint that it was almost inaudible.

"We are safest from eaves-droppers here," said Dick. "No one can be very close to us. It is my belief that the smuggler has only made a feint of going away, and that he has made his way to some place where he can both see and overhear what happens!"

"Like enough," said Tom. "Like enough!"

"I may be wrong, but it can be no harm to be on the safe side. What did you think of my narrative? Was it plausible?"

"First-rate; and as for the chief, I look upon him as a jolly old file."

"What I want to say is this. By no means let slip a hint which will serve to make him aware who we really are."

"I will take care of that!"

"So will I! And now most unquestionably the best thing we can do is to join his band!"

"Very well, my friend. If you are willing I am!"

"One of my principal motives for wishing to join is that we shall be quite lost sight of, and shall be able to return to the road with spirit!"

"Ah! the road!" said Tom King. "Hurrah for the road—hur—!"

Dick put his hand over his mouth.

"You have forgotten your caution."

"I did for the minute."

"Be careful, or you will spoil all. Now for my own part, to return to the subject, I see no great harm in smuggling!"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well, then. The conscientious part of the business is settled!"

Tom laughed.

"I daresay we shall like the change very well for a time, and when we are tired of it we will give them the slip. We shall be sure to have plenty of chances!"

"Oh, yes, that will be no trouble! But how about Bess?"

"Ah!"

"You had forgotten her!"

"I had."

"What shall you do?"

"What can I? The only thing will be to let her remain where she is and take care of herself. I'll warrant she does not stray far. Perhaps she is safer there than in any place we could find."

"If she is not seen."

"That is the only thing. But come, have you made up your mind about joining?"

"Quite."

"Very well, be circumspec and don't forget the ports we have assumed."

"Do not fear! We will take our seats now, and wait for the arrival of the ship."

In ten minutes afterwards he entered.

From the appearance of his clothes, which were muddy and wet, they considered he was quite in earnest when he said he was going down to the beach.

Our friends were pleased.

"It will be a rough night and no mistake!" he said.

"I never saw the ocean such a colour but once before, and that was a matter of twenty years ago, when a hurricane swept over all England, and destroyed nearly all the shipping off the coast! That was an awful night indeed!"

"And you say the sea looks the same colour to-night!"

"It does! Thank goodness, our cargo is safe on shore. But come," he added, "have you made up your minds? Do you accept my offer?"

"We have talked the matter over."

"Yes."

"And, under the circumstances, have come to the conclusion, we had better join."

"Bravo!" said the chief, his eye sparkling with gratification. "I shall be proud of having two such brave hearts under my command."

To conceal a smile, as much as anything else, the two highwaymen bowed deeply.

"Are you ready to join now?"

"Yes," said Dick and Tom, in one voice, "at once!"

"And your names?"

"Those we shall be obliged to keep secret, as well as our rank, as we said before."

CHAPTER LXIV.

DOINGS IN THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE.—OUR FRIENDS BEGIN TO HAVE SOME MISGIVINGS.

"VERY good," said the smuggler chief, "you can keep that a secret as long as you like, but you will have to choose two names by which you may be known."

"Just so," said Turpin. "You can call me Richard."

"And me, Thomas," said Tom King.

"Let us go, then, into the outer cavern. It will be necessary for you to take the oath of fidelity in the presence of all the crew."

To this proposition our friends were obliged to consent. It seemed strange, having been so long accustomed to command themselves, to be under the orders of another.

And yet the thing pleased them, from its perfect strangeness.

On reaching the large cave, they found assembled there a goodly number of men.

On a future occasion Dick counted them, and found they were twenty-three in number. Including the chief and themselves, twenty-six, in all.

Rather a formidable gang.

It would seem from their manner that they already were aware that two more members were about to be added to the band.

As soon as the two made their appearance, the whole of the smugglers formed themselves into a circle round them.

The oath was then administered.

Tom King and Dick Turpin were thenceforward sworn smugglers, and in duty bound to obey the chief, or, as he was styled, king.

In a very short time our friends contrived to make themselves at home.

They became immediately much more favourites with the crew.

It was at a late hour when they separated.

Three days passed thus, during which time Turpin and King took their turns with the rest in keeping guard.

One of the smugglers, who was well skilled in wounds, had attended to Tom's shoulder, which was now quite well.

But however grateful this rest at first was, our friends quickly wearied of it, and longed for the excitement of action.

The smuggler king still maintained his friendly demeanour towards them. He was delighted beyond measure

that chance had thrown two such people in his way.

But on the evening of the third day, they observed an unusual amount of bustle and activity.

Of this, however, they feigned to take no notice, but waited for some explanation to be given them. They would not seek it.

Their curiosity was soon gratified, for the smuggler king approached them and said—

"To-night, you will have an opportunity of showing the crew what you are made of."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we hope to land safely a very valuable cargo of French silks, in doing which, we shall want you to lend us a hand."

"We shall only be too glad to do that," said Dick, "for we were both growing tired of our inactivity. When shall you want our services?"

"In two hours," said the chief, "and during that time I should advise you to lay aside the clothes you have on, and attire yourselves like the rest. You will find them more suitable."

To this both consented, and when they, at the expiration of the time specified, made their appearance, the smuggler king scarcely knew them.

"Come on," he said. "Do nothing but follow me, and obey the instructions which I give."

We should have stated that during the three days neither of our friends had been permitted to approach the outlet of the caverns.

Now they were going to do so they looked about them observantly.

The large cave communicated, by means of a long winding passage, with a large natural hollow in the rocks.

At short and regular distances along this passage sentinels were always posted.

At the end of the passage nearest the beach was a door so artfully formed of stone that, when closed, it could not be distinguished from the remainder of the rocks, even by the keenest eye.

The door was thrown wide open, to allow the crew to pass out.

The cold night air, for it was long past sunset, came most refreshingly upon our friends.

They were the last to pass through the door and then it was closed quickly behind them.

Both looked back at the sound, but no trace of the outlet through which they had passed could they see.

The black shiny rocks rose up on all sides of them in huge gloomy masses.

The hollow in which they stood was almost in the shape of a horseshoe.

At low tide, which it then was, the sea left it firm and dry.

At high tide the water rose to a level with the little door in the rocks itself.

The waves beat with a sullen dash upon the sand.

At a word from the smuggler king the men divided themselves into two companies, and each one going to a particular crevice among the rocks, drew forth a cutter.

Slight judges of nautical matters as our two highwaymen were, they could not help noticing the beautiful make of these vessels, which were about the size of those with which men of war are provided.

The two boats were pushed into the water.

The smuggler chief took his seat in the larger one of the two and motioned our friends to sit near him.

They obeyed, and were followed by eight other men, who seated themselves at the oars.

All were fully armed.

The other boat was manned by ten more of the crew. Their directions were to follow the first cutter.

The boats were shoved off.

Very glad were Dick and Tom that they had not been separated.

The men at the oars bent to their task with right good will, and they made great speed through the water.

As soon, however, as they got far enough out at sea to feel the breeze, which was quite fresh, the smugglers laid aside their oars and hoisted a sail.

Those in the second boat did likewise.

Their speed was now much increased, and despite the shrewdness of the wind, our friends could not conceal a feeling of exultation as they went bounding over the waves.

Their pleasurable emotions were also still further increased from the fact that they were quite in the dark as to what they were about to do, or where they were about to go. The extent of their knowledge lay in the few words the smuggler king had spoken to them in the caven.

As they looked back they could see the gable roofs of the deserted mansion at Durley Chine clearly defined against the lighter colour of the sky.

But their attention was quickly distracted from this object by the captain's motions.

A packet of some kind which he had taken from the pocket of his overall, lay upon the prow of the cutter.

It was conical in shape, and about six inches high.

The top was a sharp point.

To the surprise, then, of our friends, the smuggler king produced a match, with which he lighted the point of the conical package.

It flamed up suddenly for a moment, and then burst into a beautiful green flame.

For a space of time during which a person might, with moderate speed, have counted a hundred, the bright light continued.

The dark surging billows which rushed past the boat, had their crests tinged with a rare beauty as the light fell upon them, but its effect upon the faces of the crew was to make them look ghastly in the extreme.

At the expiration of the time mentioned, the bright and beautiful light faded away, leaving so black a darkness behind it that the nearest objects became for a few moments invisible.

That this was a signal was pretty evident, and our friends looked for its result with very great interest.

The smuggler king, who, in accordance with his invariable practice, had never spoken a word during the expedition, except when giving brief directions to his men, scanned the horizon with a keen and searching glance.

He was clearly expecting some reply.

But none came.

Dick, who was seated nearest to him, noticed that he sat down with a vexed and disappointed air.

In the meantime, the little vessels scudded at a prodigious rate through the water.

Our friends looked round.

The darkness had rapidly increased.

The moon would not rise for nearly five hours, and the heavens were besides covered with a huge slate-coloured cloud.

It required an effort for them to see the second cutter, which still kept precisely in their wake.

After a little time, however, the smuggler king produced another conical package which he placed upon the same spot as he did the former one.

Ere he lighted it, however, he placed a powerful night-glass to his eye, and carefully examined the whole of the horizon with it.

When he was looking in a direction in a line with the course the cutters were taking, Dick fancied he heard him give vent to an ejaculation, but of its signification he had no idea.

The smuggler king put down his glass.

He applied a light to the second package.

This time the light was yellow, or amber-coloured.

As soon as it had become quite extinct, Dick saw another light of precisely the same tint, but apparently at a great distance.

It looked like a torch, for the flame was not any larger, and, unless it had been looked for, would scarce have been perceived.

The smuggler chief, as he resumed his seat laid his hand upon Dick's shoulder, and said—

"All's well!"

CHAPTER LXV.

HIS MAJESTY'S REVENUE CUTTER "OSPREY" MAKES SAD HAVOC AMONG THE CREW OF THE SMUGGLER KING.

It was something quite unprecedented for the smuggler king to make the remark he did, for one of the laws he was most stringent about having observed was, that no one composing the crew should utter a syllable while out upon one of their excursions, and himself to do no more than give orders which were absolutely necessary.

But he made an exception in favour of our friends.

Never was a man more confident upon anything than he was that the new members of his band were really part and parcel of the aristocracy of England.

It is a misfortune that it should be an element in the mental composition of most people to have too lofty an idea of the excellence of birth, and too poor a one of genuine merit when displayed in any of its numerous forms.

But it is probable enough the smuggler would not have been so much in favour of our friends had it not been for the calm contempt of danger which they both displayed.

Bravery in a man was a sure and ready passport to the smuggler's rugged heart; but still we cannot help thinking that on this occasion the passage was facilitated by the belief that those who had displayed the quality he most admired in such a remarkable manner were gentlemen of rank.

When the captain said "All's well!" Dick naturally enough turned his eyes in the direction whence he had seen the responsive light proceed.

The smuggler king observed it, and continued—

"You will understand all soon," he said. "That light which you saw just now over yonder in answer to mine came from the prow of the *Snake*, the name of the vessel which brings the articles half way across the channel."

"I guessed as much!"

"They will make all sail now, for seeing the light was yellow they will know it is the second signal we have given."

"But look," said Dick, whose eyes were still directed towards the approaching sail. "Look, they are making signals to you now, are they not?"

The smuggler sprang to his feet, and again applied the telescope to his eye.

"They appear to me to have hung three lanterns in the shape of a triangle," said Dick, who also rose and stood at the smuggler's side. "Is it not so?"

"It is," said the chief, shutting up his glass with a sudden snap.

"I presume," said Turpin, "they mean that all is not well?"

"You are right! That is exactly what they do mean!"

"Danger?"

"Yes."

"Do they point out the precise form the danger is to take?"

"Yes!"

"Then it does not much matter, for, knowing that, you can take your steps accordingly!"

The smuggler king turned round and regarded Dick with a look of admiration.

"You are a brave man, apparently," he said, "and seem not to value peril in the least! We shall see presently whether you are really what you seem!"

Dick smiled.

"You have not told me the meaning of those signals."

"No, but I will do so! Three lights in that position signify that the coast-guard have some inkling that a run is about to be attempted to-night, and are on the look out for us!"

"Is that all?"

"All?" repeated the smuggler, and encouraged too, as you will find!"

"H—m! Perhaps so," said Dick, carelessly. "I am free to confess that I know very little about fighting on the sea!"

"It is by no means certain," said the smuggler king, "that we shall actually come in contact with them!"

"Oh!"

"I shall not court an encounter, for they are always in a position to do us much damage with their heavy guns!"

"I suppose so."

"But stay! I will take a sweep round again with my glass, and see if any other craft is in sight."

As he spoke, the smuggler chief took up his telescope and examined the whole of the horizon attentively.

"I can see nothing suspicious," he said. "It may turn out to be a false alarm. A man on the look-out is posted on the *Snake*, and should a vessel ~~have~~ in sight a red lantern will be shown."

"Your arrangements seem very good."

"They are as perfect as we can make them."

Nothing further was now said, for the interval between the two cutters and the *Snake* lessened rapidly.

The smuggler king now had his mind fully occupied in giving directions to his men.

In ten minutes more the *Snake* reached them.

Things were ordered with great skill.

Everything and everybody was in readiness.

One cutter was on one side of the *Snake*, and the other on the other.

A number of rather small packages were rapidly transferred from one to the other, and stowed away.

Our friends performed their part by receiving the packages from the deck of the *Snake*, and handing them to the crew of the cutter.

The amount of work got through in a short space of time was astounding.

The packages being made so small, enabled them to be handled with the greatest dexterity.

As for the smuggler king, so soon as his cutter came in contact with the *Snake*, he climbed with great agility on board, doubtless for the purpose of settling matters with the captain.

The *Snake* was a small vessel not much larger than a yacht, and in that dim light our friends could see that her sailing capabilities must be something extraordinary.

But suddenly there arose a report that was absolutely deafening.

A blinding sheet of flame shot before their eyes.

Groans—screams—ejaculations of rage arose from the smuggler's vessels, and mingled with the crashing of timber and the din of falling masts.

So utterly unexpected was this event, that our friends were completely overcome, and for a moment knew not whether they were alive or dead.

A dark bulky form dropped from the *Snake* into the cutter.

"Confusion!" he cried. "The revenue ship *Osprey* has stolen upon us, unawares! Quick! quick! To your oars like men! Row—row for your lives! Haste! haste! We shall escape them yet! Bend your backs, and strain your arms if ever you want to see dry land again! The goods are all landed! and, if we try, all may yet be well! Row, my men! Row! Row for your lives, or the coast-guard will overtake us!"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE "*OSPREY*" KEEPS UP THE CHASE, AND DESTROYS THE CUTTER.

AGAIN at this moment did another broadside burst from the portholes of the revenue ship, and the bright glaring light revealed for a fleeting instant her dark hull, her decks, her cordage, all thronged with well-armed men.

That brief flash sufficed also to show the *Snake*, fearfully crippled about her spars and rigging, endeavouring, like some wounded animal, to crawl away.

It showed, also, the cutter in which our friends were, and revealed the form of the smuggler king as he stood up in the bows quivering with excitement.

The other cutter, too, was seen in the rear, endeavouring to reach its companion.

Then all became lost to sight.

A darkness that seemed ten times greater than it really was, seemed to enshroud all things.

The speed with which the foremost cutter dashed through the water was something fearful.

But the greater danger always submerges the lesser one, and so this was not heeded.

The anxiety of the smuggler king was extreme.

He shouted out his orders until his voice grew harsh and inarticulate.

Then again did the portholes of the *Osprey* open and vomit forth flame and death.

Once more was the scene momentarily illuminated.

But this time the guns appeared to have been specially aimed at the two retreating boats, for a perfect shower of missiles whistled through the darkness over the crew's heads.

The sail which they had put up suffered severely.

Indeed, it was thought they would have to cut it down.

But, so long as it preserved its perpendicularity, this they determined not to do.

The oarsmen worked nobly, and urged the little vessel through the waves with greater swiftness than it had ever gone before.

Three spare oars had been taken from the bottom of the boat.

One was handed to Turpin, with injunctions to make use of it.

One to Tom King.

The other the smuggler chief himself took.

The addition of the three oars made a perceptible difference in the rate of their progression.

They had, too, the tide in their favour, which was a very great matter indeed.

Our friends looked around.

No single object met their view.

Even the waves that were displaced by the boat were scarcely visible.

But it was towards the land that Dick and Tom looked.

They had no clear idea of how far they might be from it.

How they would have rejoiced could they have seen the roof tops of Durdley Chine.

The second cutter was also hid from sight.

Their assailant, too, was not to be seen, nor would she be until another of those dreadful discharges took place.

But to some extent this darkness favoured our friends, for, of course, it prevented the crew of the *Osprey* taking such careful and deliberate aim at them as they would otherwise have done.

All was very silent now. Since the smuggler chief had taken an oar he had ceased to shout to his men, for he thought that perhaps was a means of directing the attention of the enemy towards them.

And now as the brief moments slipped away, and no token of aggression came from their foe, they began to indulge in the hope that she had lost them.

Fain would the crew of the first cutter, in which our friends were, have shouted out to their companions in the second to know whether they were all safe, but they felt they dared not.

It was too hazardous.

The friendly cry might reach the ears of their enemy, and so draw her down upon them.

Therefore they were silent, and bent all their energies to the task of propelling their vessel through the water.

But when those who had been less sanguine than the others about having eluded their antagonist, began indeed to think that such was the case, another volley came to show them the erroneousness of their supposition.

Nearer and deadlier—much deadlier—was this broadside than the preceding ones.

The report of the guns seemed to shake earth and ocean.

The sheet of flame that issued from the vessel's side revealed everything plainly.

The *Osprey*, with her crowded decks of well-armed men, and who, as yet, had not received a single shot in return, was rather less than a mile to the leeward.

They saw, for a period of time so short, that we have no word that expresses it, the outlines of the second cutter, which was quite half-a-mile in their wake.

They had not made such good speed as their comrades.

Then it was gone.

Utterly.

They saw it no more.

That broadside had caught the second cutter fairly between wind and water, and swamped her in a moment.

Never was there annihilation so sudden—so complete.

A deep and bitter curse came from the lips of the smuggler chief.

Then all again was darkness.

Of all the perilous and critical positions in which our friends had ever been placed, this was surely the most perilous and most critical.

What chance was there of escape?



[THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DICK TURPIN AND THE SMUGGLER KING.]

None, unless they should be fortunate enough to reach the shore within the space of a few minutes.

With an ever-increasing anxiety our friends looked behind them, but so dark was it that they could scarce see a dozen yards.

Both were uneasy because they could not correctly estimate their true position; if they had been able to do so they would have had no trepidation whatever.

The smuggler king, however, they could not but regard with admiration. As each new danger and difficulty arose he showed himself superior to it.

Without ceasing to use the oar, he gave, in a suppressed voice, orders to his crew, who obeyed them instantly, for they had implicit confidence in his ability to save them.

At a word from the smuggler king, Dick took up the ship's telescope, and applying it to his eye scanned closely the whole of the horizon.

For some time he could see nothing. Presently, however, some dark object made itself apparent.

It was small.

It was in motion.

"I can see the ship!" he said; "but it appears to be at some considerable distance."

"Is she keeping in our course, think you?"

"I cannot tell that," replied Turpin. "I am not yet used to it. I would advise you to take the glass yourself. I can point in the right direction."

"I will do so," said the smuggler king, throwing down his oar. "Ha!" he added, as he saw the chase. "She has lost us, I believe. She is tacking about, first here, then there. Hurrah! No, she sees us, by Jove, and is coming dead in our wake!"

"Never mind that," he continued, addressing his men.

"We are close to the land now, and they are in the rear considerably. Pull again, as you have pulled before. It will be high tide then, and we shall escape them without difficulty."

Upon hearing the assurance that the distance to the

shore was insignificant, the men plied their oars with right good will.

Then came another discharge from the revenue ship.

Assuredly this was for no other purpose than to show them the position of the vessel of which they were in chase.

But it served much better to show the smugglers the exact position of their enemy.

She was fearfully close.

The smugglers still rowed on. It would have been the height of impolicy for them to have made any demonstration in reply to this discharge, which certainly harmed them not in the least.

Five minutes of the most intense anxiety elapsed.

Then the smuggler chief spoke to his men in a tone of relief.

"Down with the sail, lads! We are ashore. Row slowly. Take care, helmsman, keep her clear."

Then the highwaymen became conscious that the little vessel drifted into a cavern.

Its sides grated against the rocks.

Then a shrill whistle came from the captain's lips, and the door in the rocks which we have before mentioned swung open.

When the smugglers took their departure it was low tide.

Then the door was dry, and they had to walk some little distance along the sand before they reached the sea.

Now it was high tide, and the water had risen until it was on a level with this curiously-contrived door.

To Dick and Tom's great surprise, the water was in the passage beyond also, and the boat shot through the opening of the rocks into it.

Then the door was closed.

Of course the darkness was most profound.

The voice of the smuggler king arose.

"Lights! lights here!" he said. "Be quick some of you. A torch here!"

In a minute or so half-a-dozen torches were lighted, and as they fairly burst into a flame, revealed all objects in the rocky passage.

The scene was picturesque in the extreme.

Our friends observed that the floor of the passage rose rapidly, so that the water did not reach more than twelve or fifteen feet into the passage.

The depth of the water in the last two or three feet was consequently insignificant, and the men at once leaped out of the boat.

Our friends did so likewise.

The water only rose just above their ankles, and in two or three steps they reached dry ground.

They would not have been human if they had not felt rejoiced at this miraculous escape, for if the smuggler's aunt had been less cleverly contrived than it was, they would, beyond a doubt, have been destroyed by the coast-guard.

As it was, they were quite safe.

To the crew on board the revenue ship their disappearance must have borne the appearance of magic.

As they all stood in the passage in a dense throng they heard distinctly the boom—boom of the guns, while, at frequent intervals, a loud report reached their ears.

But the smugglers were quite out of their reach now.

Slowly and silently—the smuggler king himself taking the lead, the little party made their way along the passage into the large cavern.

Here a huge fire was blazing.

It was most welcome, for the men were, one and all, cold, hungry, tired, and wet.

They hastened their steps.

Then reaching the fire, which was burning in the centre of the cavern, they threw themselves wearily upon the ground around it, their chief setting the example.

Turpin and King were glad enough to do the same. They felt what they had gone through much more severely than their companions, because they were so unused to it.

In fact they, as well as every one there present, were dreadfully fatigued.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE HISTORY OF TOM KING, THE HIGHWAYMAN.

No one spoke.

A deep gloom seemed to overshadow the hearts and countenances of all present.

On the face of the smuggler chief this feeling was plainly perceptible, but there was mingled with it one of rage.

More than one-half of the men who had looked up to him as their master were now at the bottom of the sea. One of his beautiful fast-sailing cutters, too, was destroyed.

Truly had that been a bad night's work for him. Never before in all their career had they met with such a terrible reverse, but yet they ought to have anticipated such a thing occurring.

In the morning that portion of the silk which was in the boat in the rocky passage was unloaded and stored away in a place designed for its reception until such time as it could be safely disposed of.

Turpin and King took their share of this work along with the crew.

When it was over they both repaired to a small chamber in the cavern side which had been fitted up for their use.

The apartment, if it could be dignified by such a name—was not much more than eight feet square.

It was, however, made very comfortable.

The rugged walls were covered with cloth, and on the floor was a thick matting.

Two large lamps illumined it.

In one corner was a rude bed.

Our friends threw themselves wearily upon it.

For a moment or so there was a silence, but then Tom King spoke.

His voice showed that he was in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

His face as well bore testimony to the same thing.

"I tell you what it is, Dick. This sort of thing may be all very well, but hang me if I like it."

"Why, what's the matter, Tom?"

"Matter—enoughs the matter, I rather think. Who would fancy the idea of living here in this style without seeing daylight? I can tell you I don't."

"Well, you needn't be so ill-tempered about it."

"But I am."

"So I see. Now, what is it you have got on your mind? Out with it, my friend!"

"Oh! nothing but what I say. I don't like the idea of being shut up here in this manner, and only going out at night in a boat to stand a chance of having your boat sunk without being able to do anything in your own defence."

"Nor I," said Dick; "but I have made no remark about it, because I didn't exactly see how it was to be helped."

"Surely, my friend, you don't think of staying here for ever," said Tom King, starting up.

"Lie down again, do, and don't excite yourself. I only intend to stay here until I see a chance of getting away."

"I am glad you have had enough of the smuggling business."

"I have, I can assure you. There is nothing daring about it."

"Daring, indeed, I should think not. It's quite contemptible!"

"And yet you must, I think, admit that the chief displayed both skill and courage in the management of affairs last night. Our escape is entirely owing to him."

"It is, I admit, but still for all that I don't like the notion of being here or under the command of any one."

"Ha! ha! Tom. You've let the cat out of the bag! That's where the shoe pinches, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that the chief reason you don't like being here is because you do not believe in having any other master than yourself."

"That has a great deal to do with it, I confess. I like my liberty, and be free to go where I like and do what I like."

"So does every one. But seriously speaking, Tom, I do assure you that if you had not broached this affair I should have done so."

"Should you?"

"Yes, and I have arranged at the first opportunity we could find to give our friends the smugglers the slip."

"You know I am willing now then. But how is it to be done?"

"Ah! that's what puzzles me. To get back through the vaults into Durley Chine is out of the question, for I know that of the band are always there on the watch."

"I know that, but then the same thing applies to the other outlet—I mean the passage leading to the sea-shore; men are always stationed there on guard."

"That's true enough; but now you must recollect the smugglers have lost half their number, so they will not be able to post so many sentinels as they did."

"To be sure not."

"It remains then for us to find which is the weakest guarded, the passage or the vaults."

"Exactly."

"I have thought the matter over, and I came to the conclusion that it was only in one way we could hope with any reason to achieve our object."

"And how is that?"

"Wait until the smugglers set out on another expedition, and manage so as to be left behind. We will then contrive to overcome what sentries there are, and be off!"

"Just so," said Tom King, somewhat appeased; "just so; or it might happen that we were left sentries ourselves!"

"It might, but I think it scarcely likely. However, I think, having said what we have, we have said all we can, and nothing now remains for us to do but wait for the course of events."

"Evidently that will be the best, and the sooner we can get off the better I shall be pleased."

"And so shall I. What a delightful thing a gallop along a nice country lane would be, would it not?"

"Oh! hold your noise. Don't talk about such things without you want to drive a fellow wild."

"But after all, Tom, I am sure there can be no life to equal a life on the road."

"No, none. Hurrah for the road! a fine night, a good nag, and plenty of money!"

"Yes. Now look here; while we are in this cavern it is quite evident we cannot enjoy the pleasure of being on the road; but I'll tell you what will be a good substitute."

"What?"

"Why, just tell me your adventures. Recollect, you are under a promise to do so, and we shan't have a much better chance than we have now."

"No, perhaps not."

"Begin then; I am all attention, I assure you."

"I have given my word," said Tom King, and his voice grew bitter and melancholy as he spoke, as though the past called up anything but pleasing thoughts in his mind; "I have given my word, but I do assure you I shrink from fulfilling it."

"No, no! Hang it all, you must not do that. Now, Tom, don't be so downhearted as you seem, but lead off in good spirits."

"That would be a sheer impossibility, Dick; I could not do it. The events of the past are too sad for me ever to be in good spirits when I think of or relate them."

"You interest me, Tom, very much. There is a true of pathos in your words which moves me exceedingly. I am ten times more anxious to hear your story than before, so really you must not disappoint me. There is another thing that makes me very curious also."

"What is that?"

"Why, you are not, like me, a rough sort of chap. Your hands and feet and ears are small—sure signs, either in men or horses, of high breeding. Your skin, too, is soft and delicate. There is the air of a gentleman about you, though I give you credit for, in a general way, disguising it pretty well, but it is so, nevertheless."

"Oh! stop, stop."

But, heedless of the interruption, Dick went on—
"You, besides, are a capital scholar. You can read and write, and you often have, when you speak, a mode of expressing yourself which can only have been acquired by long intercourse with people of highly-cultivated intellect and careful study of the works of our best writers."

Tom smiled when his comrade ceased, but it was in a sickly fashion.

"Really, Dick," he said, "you will make me out presently, I shouldn't wonder, to be what our friend the smuggler king thinks I am—namely, a nobleman in disguise. Ha! ha!"

"Now, it's no good your trying to get up a laugh with such a face as that on, so give up the attempt at once."

"But it is most amusing. I did not think, though, that you had studied me so closely as you appear to have done."

"Nor have I studied you, but it would be scarcely possible for anyone with powers of observation to be with you so constantly as I have without perceiving just what I have perceived."

"Indeed!" said Tom, "then I must have been very clumsy."

"Clumsy? What do you mean?"

"Well, Dick, my friend, I have promised to tell you the story of my life, and I will not go back from my word. Therefore, I may as well confess that I have acted a part, so your surmises are correct; but I have acted my part clumsily, or else you would not have seen what you have."

There was some chagrin in the tones in which Tom King pronounced these words, as though he was scarcely pleased to find his companion had observed so much.

Turpin noticed it, but made no remark.

He was too anxious to hear what might fall from Tom's lips, in the shape of a narrative, to jeopardize its relation by anything he might say or do.

Therefore he remained silent, and waited for his comrade to commence.

But King seemed to have fallen into a deep reverie.

The past, with all its joys, disappointed hopes, dark sorrows and regrets, was flooding back upon his soul.

His face grew pale and then assumed an expression of such pain and mournfulness, that Turpin, as he perceived it, half repented that he had touched a chord which had produced so powerful an effect upon his friend.

He said as much to him, and then added—

"But, Tom, do you not think that the mere narration of your troubles to me will ease your mind?"

"It might do so. I cannot tell."

"You will be sure of meeting with true sympathy."

"I am aware of that, and therefore, if you will listen, I will commence, and when I have done I will ask you whether I have not been more sinned against than sinning?"

Turpin changed his position to one that commanded a view of his friend's countenance.

Then, after a few moments' silent reflection, as though he were considering which was the best point at which to begin, Tom King began in a voice that was unsteady with emotion, to relate that which he had never before breathed to a human being—the story of his life.

As he proceeded, the trifling expression of his face communicated itself to his friend's, and Turpin listened to one of the most extraordinary narratives that he had ever heard.

It was full of interest.

In the succeeding chapter it is given in Tom King's own words.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE FAR FROM SATISFIED WITH THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SMUGGLERS—THE STORM.

"You will in a moment understand the reluctance which I feel to begin this history, when I tell you that it will involve the exposure of my own deep, great, and ever-lasting shame."

"The story shall be told in as few words as possible."

"Over many and many an acre of fertile English soil stretch the domains of the Marquis of Belgard. Large tracts in the counties of York, Durham, Cumberland, and Somerset are owned by him."

"It is not, however, of the present marquis that I am about to speak, but his father and mother."

"The latter was a woman who was loved by all who saw her. All those qualities which are precious in the female sex were here in excess. Gentleness, devotion

unselfishness, virtue and beauty are the names of a few of them.

"Her husband, the marquise, I do not remember save in a dreamy way, which is perhaps more owing to talking and thinking much about him than actual recollection.

"However, from my earliest years I can remember the marchioness. She was my mother!"

The voice of the highwaymen failed him. He tried to go on, but could not.

Turpin's astonishment was intense.

"The marchioness your mother?" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, is it possible? By what strange mutation of fortune did you become a highwayman? You, the son of a nobleman of one of the highest ranks?"

"You may well ask those questions," said Tom King, subduing his emotion. "It seems impossible, does it not? but it is true, and in the tale I have to tell you the whole will be explained.

"I was barely two years old when my father, the Marquis of Belgard, died. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that I retain only an indistinct and confused impression of what he was like. But my mother—my dear mother—whom I loved a thousand times more than mothers usually are loved, I can recollect always. It is not three years since she died. Sorrow and shame broke her gentle heart."

King again found it necessary to clear his throat.

"From my infancy until I reached my eighteenth year. I lived with her a most retired life at a mansion on the marquise's estates in Cumberland. We saw scarcely any visitors; the only ones, in fact, were the family of the Earl of Standon, who had some estates adjoining ours.

"But one thing occurred that at all disturbed the monotony of my life.

"I loved.

"It seems strange, no doubt, to you, Dick, to hear me say that I loved, as a young and ardent spirit deprived of all society can love, earnestly, fondly, truly.

"The object of this adoration was the eldest daughter of the Earl of Standon. Her name was Charlotte.

"You will not have patience to hear me describe her; nor have I the mind to do it. To a lover, his mistress is perfection. Such was Charlotte in my eyes.

"The love I had for her was returned. It was sanctioned, too, by our parents, who looked forward to our union with undissembled pleasure.

"She was little more than one year my junior—that is to say, eighteen—the age when the personal attractions of a woman are at their full.

"We had many and many times repeated those lines of Shakspeare, to the effect that the 'course of true love never did run smooth;' and never did so without referring to our own case, which seemed to prove the falsity of the assertion.

"But soon a time came for us to feel its truth.

"And now I have to tell you that about my father which will brand him with infamy.

"My mother was not his wife.

"Do not misunderstand me. She was no leman. The ceremonies of the church united them; but he had another wife alive.

"She was far, far below him in station. A poor girl, in fact, with whom, when a young man, he had fallen desperately in love, and whom he secretly married.

"A son was born.

"His eldest son.

"You are beginning to see now what is coming.

"However, to return. In a little time my father tired of this first wife. He had seen my mother. She was lovely—she was rich. He loved her.

"Of his marriage with the village girl no one knew a syllable. He had kept it a profound secret.

"Now he thought he would put an end to it altogether.

"It would seem he laid a plot for her destruction, and actually lured her into the snare, but she with her child managed to escape.

"She disappeared.

"No one heard anything of her; no trace could be discovered.

"Then the marquise married my mother.

"I am the fruit of that union.

"At length, just as I was about to attain my twentieth year, the news came to us that my father had been mar-

ried before, and that he had a son, the issue of that marriage, who was the heir to the whole of the estates.

"This tale at first my mother resolutely believed, but it came out in evidence—for, of course the matter went to trial—that a woman who had for years lived among all the poverty and crime of London, had sworn upon her dying bed that she was Marchioness of Belgard.

"This story was at first not listened to, but she produced a marriage register, the authenticity of which was beyond dispute.

"In her last moments she swore that the love she had for her unworthy husband was the sole reason that she had not divulged the secret before, and that now she felt compelled to do it in justice to her son.

"Her son was found.

"He, so far as could be learned, was a most disreputable character, but that mattered nothing—he was the heir.

"Of course I need not tell you that the verdict was pronounced in his favour.

"The shock broke my mother's heart. She died as soon as the intelligence was brought to her.

"Thus suddenly—unexpectedly—I became an orphan and an outcast!

"Naturally enough I sped to pour out my troubles upon the breast of her I loved, and who had by the most solemn vows sworn an undying love for me. I sought her; I found her.

"Fool! insensate fool I was! But I was young then, and believed woman what she seemed. I ought to have known that now she would find her affection for me suddenly cooled down, but I did not for a moment entertain the thought that she would prove false. I should have as soon believed the sun's rays were cold!

"It is not needful for me to relate the particulars of the interview I had with her. Let it suffice to say she found she loved me no longer; her friends would never consent to her union with me, she said.

"False, hollow-hearted woman! true type of her deceitful sex. It was the position I should have given her that she loved and longed to have—not me.

"I was foolish enough to upbraid her; I knew no better then.

"Already was I guilty of the greatest crime of which the titled and the rich are cognizant—I was poor!

"Completely crushed at thus beholding my dearest hopes foregone, I fled, fled I knew not, cared not whither. All I sought was oblivion from thought.

"Vain search—I found it not.

"But, as time elapsed, the violence of my anguish became less, and I was able to think a little of my position.

"I hated—hated with a fierce, bitter, burning hatred—all mankind!

"I ought to mention that the true heir to the estates offered to me a sum of money and a small estate, but my pride would not suffer me to come forward and be known. I fled—disappeared.

"The place to which I directed my steps was London.

"Day after day, in that mighty wilderness, did I wander about, having no aim, no object.

"By great good luck, I had a considerable sum in my possession, as well as valuables in the shape of jewelry, which represented as much more.

"On this I lived.

"It was in a dark, old-fashioned inn in Coldbath Fields that I took up my temporary abode. I lighted upon the place by accident.

"One wintry afternoon, as I was sitting in the dreary taproom, there came in two persons.

"Having nothing else to occupy me, I lifted up my eyes as they entered, and there was something so peculiar, or, more properly speaking, remarkable about them that I regarded them with the greatest interest.

"The one who entered first was in height, shape, feature, everything a man could be. He united, without incongruity, the grace and beauty of Apollo with the strength and frame of Hercules.

"His costume well befitted him. It had a dash about it that harmonized well with his bearing.

"His companion was very different.

"The style, too, in which they were dressed was similar, but there all likeness ceased between them.

"This second man was rather short and very slightly made.

"Both sat down.

The first comer drew a chair up to the fire, and threw himself into it with a grace both rare and admirable.

The other, in a quiet way, sat down upon the screen.

The landlord seemed to know both well. They ebated and laughed together for some moments.

"Suddenly, however, I heard the rapid trampling of horses' feet in the street.

The next moment at least a dozen men rushed into the room.

"Hurrah!" they shouted. "Here they are! On them, my men!"

A most deadly struggle now ensued.

The new comers, I saw, were police officers.

But it was not possible for such an unequal contest to continue long.

The first comer had drawn a sword, which he used with terrible effect.

But, knowing victory was out of the question, he turned to fly, and called to his comrade to follow his example.

"Then was performed the most daring feat I ever saw or heard of.

"This man, hemmed in, surrounded as he was by foes, took one terrific leap, and, to my unutterable amazement, went clear through the window into the street.

"There was a struggle on 'gide for a second, and then all was still.

"He had escaped.

"But his companion was not so fortunate.

"He was caught and securely handcuffed, and then led off.

"Those two men were Claude Duval and Sixteen-stringed Jack!

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE STORM—THE NIGHT EXCURSION—THE MINUTE GUN—THE WRECK OF THE MERCHANTMAN.

"CLAUDE DUVAL and Sixteen-stringed Jack?" repeated Dick Turpin, in the utmost surprise. "Can it be really possible? And egad! Yes, it must be, for jumping through the window in that fashion was just like Claude. Jack, you say, was captured?"

"He was."

"Now look here, Tom, I have let you tell your history so far without attempting to interrupt you. One surprise, in fact, follows so close upon another, that you fairly take away my breath; but when you mentioned two such celebrated individuals, I could not help breaking in."

King smiled.

"I did not notice it at the time, but now I do remember, you did not utter a word either in the way of question or comment."

"That I certainly did'nt, but it has all got to come."

"Do not let us recur to it! You know enough to make you aware that it cannot be a pleasant topic for me to discuss. I have been led away by my feelings to say, perhaps, more than I ought to have said, and my narrative is doubtless somewhat incoherent. Still, for all that, my friend, I think I have been sufficiently explicit to make you understand it, and, such being the case, say no more, for when I speak of it it always unmans me."

"Tom, my friend, I have a greater respect for you since I have heard your story than ever I had before. You have been hardly used by fate, and it is a thousand pities for a generous, noble nature like yours to be turned to gall!"

"When I reflect upon the past and think of what I might have been—what there appeared to be every human probability of my becoming, one of the proudest of England's peers, and then think what I am—a highwayman, a breaker of the public peace, and destined for an ignominious end—I feel as though I was going mad, and for that reason I strive, as much as possible, to banish thought and the remembrance of past, present, and future."

"As—only natural that you should do so. I have not heard the sequel to your story, but I can easily enough imagine it. You found no other course open to you, so you took to the road, as many another gallant heart has done before you."

"Well, well, let us say no more about that."

"And there is one question I would fain ask on the score of curiosity."

"What is it?"

"May I ask it?"

"Certainly."

"It is, what became of Lady Charlotte?"

"Lady Charlotte?"

"Yes."

"Did I not tell you?"

"No."

"Ha! ha! I thought I did! I said it was the name and title that she loved, and, ha! ha! ha! she won them, too!"

"Now, pray, Tom, for the sake of my nerves, don't laugh in that horrible, discordant fashion again. You have positively set all my teeth on edge. Don't disguise your mind from me now you have told me so much. Be yourself, I beg; you were never born with the capabilities of acting that which you do not feel."

"I have long felt that, Dick. But, however, to answer your question. Lady Charlotte, who professed so much affection for me, cast me off, as I said, and married the true heir."

"Then, Tom, the thought that you have escaped from the clutches of such a heartless being ought to make you rejoice; for, depend upon it, she is one of those girls who will never make any man happy."

"I have struggled with all my might against my passion for her, and, unworthy as she has proved, believe me, Dick, so firm a hold has she taken of my affections, that I love her even now."

"It is infatuation."

"You may call it what you choose, the fact remains unaltered. I love her still."

"Then yours must, indeed, be strong affection."

"And yet I feel I hate her—hate her, and the whole of her accursed sex."

"Ah, then, there you are wrong. I will never consent to believe that all women have dispositions like her, and would act as she has done. Rather would I cling to the conviction that she is all that is pure, all that is good in human nature."

"Then is human nature most impure and bad if it is so? There is not one who knows of love and virtue, save by name, and who would not barter everything they possess for lucre."

"I see very plain," said Dick, "it is quite folly for us to speak upon that subject, so I say by all means let it drop. I have faith in woman's goodness, you have not. Time will show which of us is in the right."

"It will. But Dick, mark my words, and I speak in all solemn seriousness, so sure as ever you are fond enough of a woman to trust her, she will betray you. Mark me if she does not."

"Pho, pho, Tom. You are in a gloomy humour. I can see it will be best not to touch upon that portion of your history. How did you know who the two persons were who came into the public-house at Coldbath-fields?"

"The landlord."

"Oh!"

"And he it was who, after gathering some inkling of my history, persuaded me to try my fortune on the road."

"And the best thing for you, since it is the only thing you could have done and continued a gentleman."

"Well Dick, to go on, Claude Duval, as I told you, escaped; and not only that, he contrived to rescue his pal Jack before the officers were halfway to Newgate."

"Bravo, Claude! Well, go on, I like to hear about him. The ladies' highwayman, as they always called him."

"Well, to my great surprise, in less than half-an-hour both highwaymen came into the public-house again, looking just as though nothing at all had happened."

"Capital! Of course the officers would not think of coming straight back to where they started."

"They didn't. The landlord introduced me, and the result of it was that I joined them in their very next expedition."

"Did you though, by Jove! Ah! Tom, I would give something if I could only call Claude and Jack pals, but there's no chance of that now, is there?"

"Very little."

"What surprises me is that you should have known them and not me."

"It is rather singular, but I was only with them a short time. So many were on the look-out for them that they were compelled to run over on to the continent to avoid being taken, and since then I have not heard of them."

"Nor I."

"I lent them all the assistance in my power, and saw them safely aboard the vessel. They wanted me to go too, but somehow I have a most insurmountable dislike of leaving England, so I remained."

"And so have I," said Dick; "I was born in it, and I hope I shall die in it."

"Oh, don't talk about dying, I beg."

"I won't if it don't please you; but go on and finish my life."

"Ah! do."

"When I saw them safely off I was entirely thrown upon my own resources, but they had let me into the secrets of the profession, so I made no doubt about getting on all right. I was most prosperous, and had not long been acting for myself when I met you."

"Nor had I, as you know. I think we must have begun somewhere about the same time. If anything, you were first."

"Very likely."

"But in one respect I do envy you exceedingly."

"And what is that?"

"Why, having been a companion of Claude Duval's. I have the highest opinion of his gallantry and courage, and I only hope that I shall some day meet with him."

"It is likely enough you will have your wish. I should never be surprised to hear he had come back to England, for it is not in his nature, any more than it is in mine, to lead an inactive life, and one devoid of excitement."

"I only hope I may see them both, and, what is more, that all four of us may have many a startling and wild adventure between us."

"Well now, Dick, I do think you ought to confess yourself satisfied. You know my former history; you can account for what little peculiarities you may have observed. You see, too, to what I am reduced by a father's villainy."

"I do; but it is an unfortunate thing that in this world the innocent party in an affair of that sort gets the greatest share of the misfortunes and disagreeables to put up with, and in that case yours is only a case of many."

"You are right enough there."

"Then it ought to be some consolation for you to be aware that you are not singled out to be different to your fellows. The consolation is a poor one, I daresay."

"It is; and no one but those who have indulged in such hopes for future happiness with the one they love can form any idea how hard it is to be bereft of all."

"Yes, I can, Tom. I can easily imagine it."

"But, even if you do, imagination must fall far short of reality. But come, let us, before we separate, make up our minds what we are to do."

"You mean with respect to the smugglers?"

"Exactly."

"Then I do not think we can do better than to make the attempt to get left behind, under some pretext or other, when the rest go out on an excursion, and then do our best towards making an escape."

"I think that would be the best. As for this life, I am thoroughly sick of it, and the sooner a change occurs the better I shall be pleased."

"It will not do, however, to be too precipitate. They are much stronger in point of numbers than we are, and it would be the height of folly for us to throw away our lives unnecessarily."

"Of course it would, and I should not counsel such a thing for a moment: but what I mean to say, do not let a chance slip by."

"Oh, there is no fear of my doing that, for I can tell you I am most anxious to rejoin my mare Black Bess."

"Ah, yes, she is in the grounds above."

"She is, and, while there, is perfectly safe, for she will be able to find plenty in the shape of green-meat to live upon; but what I am afraid of is, that she may stray away, be seen, and captured."

"That would be a loss indeed."

"It would—a most irreparable loss; but still, I do not much fear this, only it might occur, and when I think of it I always get uneasy."

"Just so. I am glad there is something to tempt you to get away."

"You think I shall find an opportunity all the sooner?"

"I do. The first one will, I hope, be seized upon and made use of by you."

"Never fear but it will. No long time can elapse without our accomplishing our aim."

"Yes, after all, as Claude Duval used to say, 'there's no life like a life on the road.'"

"And he was quite right. How glad I should be if at this moment I could take him by the hand, as I do you, and call him friend."

"I should wonder if you don't one of these days. Many unlikely things have happened."

CHAPTER LXX.

DICK TURPIN DEFEATS THE DESIGNS OF THE SMUGGLERS, AND TOM KING SAVES A LIFE.

A WEEK elapsed.

Seven entire days; and during that time nothing had occurred to at all disturb the monotony of our friends' existence, nor had a chance offered itself of putting their design into execution.

Tom King was vexed and impatient.

But it was no good for him to chafe. There he was, and there he was obliged to be.

And in this interval scarce one of the smugglers had left the cave, and no other run of goods had been attempted.

The *Snake*, the smuggler chief, by some inexplicable means, had learned, had with much difficulty managed to get back to port.

The week had been chiefly spent by our friends in taking their share of the work.

In groping about the cavern, Tom King had come across several articles which greatly called forth his surprise; so he pocketed them, and showed them to Dick, who was as much surprised as he.

From these articles but one inference could be drawn, and that was, the smuggler king was not a smuggler only, but something worse.

Our friends became much more circumspect.

And so a whole week glided away.

Towards midnight on the eighth day, a fearful storm arose which increased in fury and violence every moment.

The howling of the wind, the rumbling of the thunder, the hoarse dash of the waves against the coast, could be heard with great distinctness in the cavern.

Nearly all, Turpin and King included, were seated round the fire, chatting and laughing with each other.

While thus engaged, there came upon their ears a prolonged wailing cry.

All started to their feet.

The highwaymen, because they wondered what such a sound meant.

The smugglers, because they recognised it as a signal.

The chief drew one or two of his crew aside, and spoke to them in a whisper.

Their eyes turned towards our friends.

Evidently, then, they were the subject of that mysterious whispered conversation.

The remainder of the smugglers, however, moved quickly about the cavern, and began encasing themselves in the tarpaulins.

Tom King was overjoyed when he perceived this, and catching Turpin by the arm, he whispered:

"Hurrah! They are going out on an excursion to-night, and we shall have a chance of bidding them good-bye!"

"They are preparing to go certainly," replied Turpin; "but whether we shall have a chance of getting off is more than I can tell. Look, the chief has got a couple of men with him, and they are talking about us I am confident, for their eyes every moment turn this way."

"Is it likely, I wonder, that he suspects us of our design?"

"I cannot tell! If he does we shall have to look after ourselves."

"Can you hear the storm, Dick? It is most fearful! Does not their leaving the cavern on such a night as this seem confirmatory of our suspicions?"

"It does—it does, indeed; and yet I hope we are mistaken. I have always admired the chief as a brave man, but if what you hint at is true, I shall be unable to think so any longer."

"You would. It is the most abhorrent of all crimes."

"At this moment the smuggler king called for our two friends to approach him."

They did so.

"We are going out on an excursion to-night in which none but old salts will be of service. We shall, therefore, be compelled to leave you here in charge of the caverns."

"At this unexpected slice of good luck, our friends had to conceal their exultation."

Turpin spoke.

"That is just as you think fit," he said. "Of course you know in what way we shall be of the greatest service to you, and we will obey your instructions."

"Good," said the smuggler king. "We leave you in trust of the place, and you will be responsible for it and all that it contains."

"You won't have to explain of us," said Dick; "but shall we be left the sole guard of the place?"

"Yes, with the exception of Willis, who is in the cavern above with the rasks, and Peters, who keeps guard at the door in the rock."

"Very good, then. What time do you leave?"

"Immediately. My men are nearly all ready. As soon as they are we are off."

The smuggler chief left our friends as he spoke.

Tom King with difficulty restrained himself from making some extravagant manifestations of delight.

Had they had the arranging of things themselves they could scarcely have made them better.

The smugglers, who were now reduced to eight men, exclusive of the two on guard and our friends, placed themselves in rank and followed their chief across the cavern.

Tramp, tramp, they could hear their feet along the rocky passage.

At last all was still.

The two highwaymen were alone.

"I think," said Tom King, "that the first thing we do shall be to take off these clothes we have on and don our own. What say you?"

"Oh, do so, by all means. If we are to go on the road again it won't do to have such things as these on."

"Certainly not. Come, then, I know where they are. Everything is ready—pistols and all."

"Bravo, Tom; I don't wonder at your anxiety to be off. Really this being shut up in the dark is quite dreadful."

"It is to me. But let us change our dresses without any more delay."

In a few minutes afterwards our friends returned to the outer cavern, and looking like themselves.

Still they paused and hesitated as to what they should do. They were, besides, desirous of not losing any chance they might have by precipitation.

They waited, therefore, for a considerable time, so that the smugglers would have time to get fairly off.

From his vest pocket Dick produced Captain Nidget's gold chronometer, and, looking at the dial, found the fingers pointed to twenty minutes to two.

"I think we may venture now, Tom," said Turpin; "but I have for the last few moments been thinking over the manner in which we are to leave this place, whether by the passage or the vaults above."

"Well—"

"I think, taking all things into consideration, it will be best for us to make our way out by the passage."

"Why?"

"Not only is it nearest, but I confess I am most curious to know whether those suspicions we have against the smuggler chief are well grounded."

"I should like to know, too, so we will go by the passage. At any rate, we shall be able to see what he is after. It is nothing very good, or he would not have left us here."

"Something, doubtless, of which we guessed we should not approve. Now, my friend, are you ready?"

"Quite ready, and more than willing."

"Follow me then!"

So saying, Dick strode across the cave in the direction of the entrance to the passage, and, drawing aside the thick curtain which was hung over the opening, both entered it.

"Tread cautiously, Dick," whispered Tom King; "recollect there is the man Peters on guard at the door, and he might be able to raise an alarm."

"Fear nothing! Let your hand slide over the wall as you go on; we shall be all right then."

The passage was in the profoundest darkness, at least that portion of it in which they now were. The guard would, of course, be likely to have a light, but the place was so serpentine that they could see nothing of it.

With the greatest of care the highwaymen crept forward, but, in spite of all their efforts, they could not avoid making an occasional slight noise.

Presently Turpin stopped, and, turning round to Tom King, said—

"This man on guard! What shall we do with him?"

"Knock him on the head!"

"I hardly like doing that. I should prefer, if possible, taking him prisoner and not doing him any further injury, unless he should make so desperate a resistance as to make it unavoidable."

"Well—well, as you like. Only take care he don't give an alarm."

"I'll look out for that. Peters is a very decent fellow, and I daresay when he knows we are resolved, he will submit to being bound without making any resistance."

"Then, if such is the case, I say walk boldly forward and tell him so."

"We will, but I should like to make my appearance as suddenly as possible, so as not to give him time either for action or reflection."

"Then you must be silent, for I fancy we must be close to him. Cannot you hear his voice?"

"Yes, he is singing a song, poor fellow, I daresay he finds it very lonely sitting there by himself!"

Tom King made no reply, and both, with the utmost caution and silence, crept forward.

The horrible din of the tempest could be heard much plainer in the passage than in the cavern, and at every step they took the sound became more audible.

But hark! another sound mingles with the tempest's roar. It is one which causes the two highwaymen to suddenly come to a halt.

Boom! boom! boom!

That was the sound.

Dull—muffled.

Coming at short but regular intervals.

Boom! boom! boom!

"It's the minute gun!" said Dick; "some vessel in distress is off the coast."

"Yes; hark! there it comes again."

In the intervals of the storm they again heard the sullen report of the signal gun.

"God help them," said Turpin, "if the wind has blown them on the rocks! When we were out that night I thought, as I looked around, what a fearfully dangerous place it must be for vessels, and how little chance of escape they would have if a storm should overtake them in that spot."

"Quick, my friend, forward! Let us dispose of Peters, and make our way on to the beach. Who knows what service we may be to the crew and passengers?"

"Who, indeed? Certainly we shall be able to render them some assistance."

After taking about a dozen more steps, they paused again. It was where the passage took an abrupt turn to the right.

Turpin being first, leaned forward, and peeped round the corner.

By the light of a torch which was stuck in the wall, he saw Peters, sitting upon a fragment of rock, and chaunting some snatches of an old sea ditty.

He had evidently not heard their approach.

Uttering a loud and fearful yell, which sounded with great effect in the vaulted passage, Dick Turpin sprang forward, and grasping Peters by the throat, bore him to the earth, and made him a prisoner before he could recover from his surprise at the sudden attack made upon him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE HIGHWAYMEN ENCOUNTER GREAT DANGER IN THEIR
PHILANTHROPIC AND RETRIBUTIVE EXPEDITION.

"Don't struggle, Peters," said Turpin. "You have nothing to fear, only we are determined not to stay here any longer; so off we go, and to do that we must overpower you, my friend. If you don't resist, you will come to no harm. If you do, you will get a crack on the head."

There is sufficient prudence in Peters's disposition to make him see the force of this reasoning, so he gave in at once, and suffered Tom King to bind him securely with a rope.

"There can be no blame laid to you, because all will know two men are a match for one, especially when taken at unawares. Your comrades will release you when they come back."

Not waiting to listen to what Peters had to say, our friends hastened to the door in the rocks, and removing the iron bar that was across it, pulled it open.

When they did so, they were for a moment or two perfectly blinded and deafened by the tremendous violence of the storm, which now burst upon them in full fury.

They stepped from the door on to the beach, which was quite dry, it then being only just about half tide.

Fain, however, were they to shelter themselves behind the rocks. They could not stand against the wind.

In this way they crept along for a considerable distance.

By screening themselves thus, and shading their eyes, our friends were able to look around them.

In front the sea was hissing, boiling, dashing, against the rocks.

Above the sky was covered with a dense black cloud. Behind was the mass of rocks, which rose up irregularly to a height of more than two hundred feet.

But as they happened to look back, both were astonished to see a bright light burning on the summit of the highest piece of rock.

It looked like the lantern of a lighthouse.

A broad beam of light streamed forth, and which must have been visible at an enormous distance.

Boom! boom!

The vessel in the offing still continued her signals of distress.

Dick placed his mouth close to Tom's ear, and spoke—"Our suspicions are certainties. Look at that light! It is a false beacon, placed there by fiends in human shape to lure an unsuspecting vessel on the treacherous rocks. The smugglers are wreckers also, and this is their accursed work."

There was a terrible energy in the way these words were uttered.

Turpin's excitement knew no bounds.

Open, daring, bold, doing what he did in the face of all, he detested treachery as such a nature only can detect it, and the proceedings of the wreckers, of whom he had often heard, filled him with abhorrence.

As we have hinted at, some days before Tom King had found in the cavern numerous little objects which had evidently come from a wreck.

This raised the suspicion in their minds that the band which they had joined were not smugglers merely, but wreckers also.

Some words which had been incautiously dropped by the crew strengthened them in the idea.

When Dick, therefore, saw from the upper crags a bright light streaming forth, he knew in a moment that it was a false beacon, but there no entice ships to their destruction.

He had heard enough about the proceedings of the wreckers to know that such a thing formed a chief part of their plan.

In a storm, those on board a vessel, seeing a light burning steadily ahead, would, of course, come to the conclusion that it had been placed there in order to guide them to a safe anchorage, or else mistake it for some other beacon which was well known to be in the vicinity.

By this means, then, the labouring vessel, struggling manfully against the storm, is urged on by the crew to her own ruin.

Then, too late, it is found that, so far from reaching a harbour of refuge, they have got entangled among the

sharp granite rocks that guard the shores of England.

It seems scarcely credible that human beings ever could act so base a part; but that it is so unfortunately there exists abundant proof.

The vessel, thus drawn close to the beach, strikes.

Then goes to pieces.

Her crew and cargo are at the mercy of the wreckers. Boom! boom! boom!

Horribly distinct, horribly mournful, came to our friends' ears the dull roar of the minute gun.

Alas! for that brave ship, help there was none.

She had dashed in between two rocks, about half a mile from the shore, that were shaped like the protuberances upon a camel's back, and there struck.

To move her in the least was impossible.

Crash! crash! With a terrible grating sound the sides of the vessel at each rise and fall of the sea chafed against the rugged sides of the two rocks, whose jagged points ground her woodwork to powder.

Thrice had the hapless crew endeavoured to launch a boat, but each time failed.

Then they resigned themselves to their fate.

Wearied and wet they thronged upon the fore-castle of the ship, which happened to be highest out of the water, and there, clinging together, as though that would protect them, they waited for their doom.

In the meantime our friends crawled slowly onward, compelled in their course to clutch tightly the slippery rocks.

Both rejoiced in their hearts, though neither spoke, that they had made their escape as they had, and resolved to do their utmost to save any of the crew of the unfortunate vessel.

But ignorant of the ground as they were, and on a night so pitchy dark, they ran the gauntlet of a thousand dangers.

On no side, however, could they see or hear aught of the wreckers.

Further, further along the line of rock, which seemed to stretch right out in the channel, went the highwaymen.

Presently, however, they found they could not go any further without actually walling into the sea, and that, of course, was out of the question.

As far as they could see, the rock stretched seaward apparently for miles.

But where they stood there was a part much lower than the rest, not ten feet high in fact, and where it was not quite so precipitous.

It was quite evident that, if they wished to be of any assistance to the crew of the sinking vessel, they must in some way or other surmount the barrier, for it was from the other side of it that the signals came.

So close as they now were to the tumbling ocean, speech was almost out of the question, so it was by signs that Dick made Tom aware he was about to make the attempt, full of peril as it was, to scale the wall.

The place, though, they found upon a closer examination, favoured them exceedingly.

Several fragments were so disposed as to be almost like steps.

But they were wet with spray, and more slippery than ice.

Undismayed, however, by the seemingly insuperable obstacles which presented themselves, they resolutely struggled to obtain a footing upon the first of these fragments. After many and many a fall and futile effort they succeeded.

To get from this on to the next was a much easier task, and so on to the next, until at length they drew themselves up on to the wall of rocks.

But at the very moment they did so there came such a furious blast of wind from seaward that nothing could withstand, and Turpin and King suddenly felt themselves dashed from their feet and hold.

They gave themselves up for lost.

Fortunately, however, for them they were close to the ledge of rock, and it was against this they were thrown, instead of being swept off on to the beach.

But such was the force and suddenness of the shock that they were for some few minutes in a state of utter insensibility.

The sea spray very soon recovered them, though.

Their heads had gone with a dreadful thump against the rock, so their ideas were at first somewhat confused.



[TOM KING IS CAPTURED BY THE DRAGOONS.]

Boom! boom! boom!

Those were the sounds that next came to their ears, and restored them to perfect consciousness.

Taking each other by the hand they crept forward on their hands and knees to the other side of the rocks, and having reached it, lay flat down upon their stomachs and peered over.

CHAPTER LXXII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING FIND THAT MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN FOR THEIR CAPTURE.

A loud and fearfully startling cry of mortal agony greeted the ears of our two friends at this moment.

Above all the din of the contending elements it rose clearly, distinctly, and there was mingled with it a crashing sound of some strong body being torn asunder.

The vessel had gone to pieces on the rocks.

It was her parting timbers that made the sickening, crashing sound.

The highwaymen drew their breath short and thick. Then they endeavoured to pierce the gloom before and below them.

Faintly—very faintly, they could see the sand.

But they were astonished to find that, though on the side upon which they had ascended the part of the rocky wall was not more than ten feet high, the other side where they so much wanted to be was as inaccessible to them as ever.

A sheer descent, not much under thirty feet in depth, was between them.

How they were to get down they knew not.

Suddenly, however, a bright light illumines the strand, and by its aid they can see things distinctly.

But fearing to be themselves seen, they crouch still closer to the rocks.

They saw the wreckers gliding about like spectres.

Compelled as they now were to remain simply spectators of what was about to take place, Turpin and King looked down with all-absorbing interest.

High and dry, beyond reach of the waves, was piled a heap of miscellaneous articles, which had been washed ashore already from the wreck.

Every time the waves broke upon the sands they brought with them some object, which was immediately seized and placed with the rest.

But to their unutterable horror they saw the smuggler chief himself with his drawn sword in his hand deliberately lying in wait for such of the crew as were washed ashore, and then dispatching them with his weapon.

Thus those who succeeded in escaping from the deep did so only to perish by the murderers' steel.

Then the body was dragged ashore.

Rifled of everything of the slightest value.

Afterwards consigned again to the deep.

It was a horrid sight, and the two highwaymen felt themselves grow fairly sick at heart and the blood stagnate in their veins.

The butchery continued.

Women, too, were served in the same ruthless manner.

But it was only while the first stunning sensation of horror was upon them that our friends could remain inactive while such deeds were perpetrated before their faces.

They raised themselves a little.

There was now a slight lull in the storm, which foretold either a total cessation of its violence or a renewal of it.

Dick took the opportunity to speak.

"Tom—Tom!" he said, "I cannot stand this. Would you ever have believed the men with whom we have consorted were such fiends? Look, there is the chief. His sword is dripping with blood. By heavens, look again; there is a beautiful girl; see, he has struck her once, and the waves carry her away. Now they bring her back, and he strikes her a second blow. He drags her ashore. Monster, he shall rue this night and its unholy work."

"He shall, if we can but reach him," replied Tom King; "but I do not see how we are to do it. To jump down would be madness."

"It would; but if no other mode of reaching presents itself I shall risk it. I am determined to put an end to this butchery, and take such a vengeance on the actors in it as will be remembered long after we have both ceased to be."

"I think," said Tom, "now that the wind has gone down so much, we may manage to crawl along this wall, and find a place nearly inland, where we can drop with greater safety."

"Let us make the attempt, my friend; anything is preferable to remaining here. Would that I had been able to save the ship."

"It would have been a glorious deed, but it is no good thinking of what has taken place; let us see what good it now lies in our power to do!"

As he uttered this practical remark, Tom, who was nearest to the shore, began to creep slowly along the rocks.

It was an attempt full of danger.

Every part was wet with the sea-spray, and made it almost an impossibility to take a hold either by the hands or feet.

But, in a case of this sort, caution and perseverance will do wonders; and so, by slow degrees, our friends got further and further along the rock, without meeting with any other accident than bruising their flesh against the more rugged portions of it.

Ten minutes only served to carry them what, under ordinary circumstances, would be considered an insignificant distance.

To their joy, however, they reached a place where they thought they could with safety reach the beach.

Holding tight with their hands, they gradually lowered their bodies into the abyss, and then, letting go, dropped upon a flat place a few feet below them.

They repeated this process again, and reached a lower portion still.

From thence their descent to the sands was easy, and they made it in safety.

The storm had evidently reached its height, and was now rapidly subsiding. The wind came only in way-

ward gusts, and the waves became more tranquil. The clouds, too, dispersed, and a gentle, subdued light spread itself over the scene.

Drawing their swords, Turpin and King rushed forward.

The wreckers were still engaged in their frightful work.

But some portion, our friends found, had gone—most probably, they thought, back to the cavern, for they could see, besides the smuggler king himself, two of his men—that is, three in all.

The highwaymen, as our readers know, had fought against longer odds than these.

So, not attempting the least concealment, they called out to them to desist.

The smuggler recognized the voice, and he turned round with great suddenness.

Dick, who was thoroughly disgusted at his brutality, made a rush at him.

"Dastardly villain!" he cried, "I have discovered the full extent of your iniquity. Defend yourself, or, so sure as there is a heaven above us, I will cut you down!"

The smuggler king uttered a cry of rage, and his sword clashed against Dick Turpin's.

Tom, in the meantime, had attacked with great resolution the two men.

A most perfect master of the art of fence was Tom King. In happier times, when his position in life was far different to what it was now, he had made it a favourite study, and many a time since had he found it serve him in the hour of need.

On this occasion he was able to perform that most difficult of all feats with the sword—that is, to parry the cuts and thrusts of two antagonists, as well as deal them slashing cuts in return.

But still this was most dangerous, and he had great difficulty to prevent one getting behind him.

The feet of the fierce combatants sank deeply in the sand.

Backward and forward, round and round, now with their feet actually in the water, and anon far up the shore, they went, until at last, a favourable opportunity occurring, Tom caught one of his assailants such a blow upon the head that he fell down at once like a log of wood.

The other, furious at the fall of his comrade, fought with increased desperation, all the time crying loudly for his chief to come and aid.

But Turpin found that individual quite enough to do to defend himself without helping other people.

Single-handed, the other smuggler stood but a poor chance with Tom, who, in less than five minutes, stretched him on the ground, bleeding profusely from at least twenty wounds, every one of which looked sufficient to cause death.

Having done this, he turned his attention to his friend, who was still desperately combating with the chief. Neither appeared to have gained any advantage over the other, or to have received a wound.

In fact, in point of skill they were well matched, though not in other respects, for the chief was taller, heavier, and stronger than Dick Turpin.

Tom King hastened to assist him, but Dick, perceiving his intention, cried—

"No—no, Tom! Hold off! It is a fair fight, and shall continue so! Sheathe your sword, my friend, and leave us to it."

Thus commanded, Tom withdrew and watched the progress of the fight.

That Turpin would eventually prove the victor he felt certain, for he noticed that there was upon his face an expression of stern determination, which he had never observed there before.

Then day dawned.

The cold, gray light stole softly over the scene, and almost seemed to have the effect of calming the roughness of the water.

As Tom gazed towards the ocean, his eye lighted on some object which was left by a retiring wave upon the sand.

Ere, however, he could reach it, another wave carried it away again.

But he perceived that it was the form of a child, apparently not more than ten or twelve years of age.

The waves once more carried it towards the beach, and Tom, stooping down, fished it out of the water, and laid it on the sand.

It was either insensible or dead.

It was a beautiful and lovely girl, and lying there in that motionless attitude, with her golden hair streaming disorderly about her, and with fragments of sea-weed hanging to it, she looked perhaps more beautiful than under other circumstances she would appear.

Tom was charmed.

But hearing the clashing of the steel which had hitherto made the air ring again suddenly cease, he turned to see the issue of the conflict.

The smuggler chief was down, and Turpin was in the act of returning his sword to its scabbard.

Upon seeing Tom bending over something not far from the water's edge, Dick hastened towards him.

"The smuggler king," he said, anticipating his friend's question, "has gone to his last account. He had some courage in him, after all, and he would not yield until death positively compelled him. It is a sad pity he was such a villain. But what is that, Tom?"

"Cannot you see? A little girl which I picked out of the water while you were engaged in combat. Has she not a lovely face?"

"She has indeed, and it would have been a thousand pities if one so fair and angel-like had been swallowed up by waters. Is she dead?"

"I fear so!" said Tom. "She is as cold as ice, and I cannot detect the least flutter in her pulse."

"Well, well, poor thing—your assistance came, after all, too late! But is this the only creature we can find belonging to the unfortunate vessel's complement?"

"I fear so," was the reply, as Tom looked searchingly along the beach; "we have come too late to save any one."

It was as he had said. A few splinters from the wreck were floating idly about, and several human forms, which had been gashed by the smuggler chief's murderous blade! but that was all.

A silence, which was most impressive remained for a few moments between the two friends, broken only by the plash, plash of the waves.

Then the sun rose.

The first beams from

"The god of day,"

gilded with a marvellous beauty the crests of the still spumous waves, and shot up in long beams of ruddy light among the clouds.

One ray, that seemed almost brighter than the rest, fell upon the child Tom had taken from the water.

It is needless to say that it added fresh beauty to her lovely features.

Tom stooped down suddenly.

"By heavens! Dick," he said, "she is alive! I saw her eyelids move slightly as the brighter light fell upon them. She lives, and we have not had our labour in vain. I will take her in my arms and carry her, and do you, my friend, lead me to the nearest habitation."

Suiting the action to the word, he picked the child up in his arms.

An exclamation came from Dick's lips.

It was echoed by a shout of anger, and Tom King, looking up, saw the remainder of the smuggler crew, armed with weapons of every description, hurrying towards them, yelling and gesticulating with rage.

"We shall have another fight, I can see," he said, as he laid the child down on the sands, and drew his sword.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

A TREACHEROUS CALM—THE DAWNING OF DESPAIR.

THERE was every reason to suppose that these men, who now ran so eagerly forward to attack our friends, had been sent back to the cavern for some purpose, and having from the distance seen what was going on, had made as much haste as possible, but arrived too late to save their rascally leader from the fate he so richly deserved.

"Come on, you cowardly villains!" shouted Dick. "Come on! we are ready to serve you as we served the rest. Come on, I say!"

As he spoke he brandished his weapon, and, without waiting for them to come, he sped forward to meet them. Tom King followed his example.

It was five or six men that they thus defied.

The dauntless bearing of our friends was not without its due effects.

The men slackened their speed, halted, and then, without waiting for a blow to be struck, turned and fled.

But Turpin and King were not disposed to let them off thus easily, and they pursued them as fast as the nature of the ground would allow.

The smugglers, though, knew the road much better than the highwaymen, and running among the rocks, disappeared.

Turpin came to a halt.

"What do you say, Tom? It is pretty clear those vermin have sought refuge in one of the many caves hereabout; shall we follow them?"

"I should like to make them feel the weight of my arm, I confess, but still I do not think it would be prudent to chase them any further. They might lure us into some place where we could not escape with life."

"That is very true. I think we may content ourselves with what we have done."

"So do I. You may depend we have put a stop to any more wrecking business being carried on in this quarter just yet a bit."

"The smuggler's band, large as it was, is now, you see, virtually destroyed, since those cowardly wretches are all that remain."

"Yes, the revenue vessel and us together have been the means of putting a few rascals out of the world."

"I cannot feel the slightest commiseration for their fate."

"Nor I. If anyone deserved to be punished with death, they did. To entice a vessel freighted with their fellow-countrymen to destruction by means of a false beacon, is diabolical in the extreme."

"No fate could expiate such an enormous crime, but I am afraid such things as we have witnessed to-night are not so uncommon as is supposed. I had frequently heard of such things, but until they were avouched by my own eyes, I never gave them credence."

"There is a point we ought to consider of at once, and that is, what we are to do in the next place. There is the little girl that I took out of the water, and who lies yonder on the beach. I cannot find it in my heart to leave her, especially as I am sure she is alive."

"You can only do as you said you should, namely, take her to some homestead close at hand, and give her in charge of the inmates."

"That must be it. A few sovereigns, which we can easily spare, will soon banish any scruples that may be felt about taking her in."

"Oh! rely upon that. Make haste across the beach, my friend, and fetch her. I will wait here for your news in case any of the smugglers should show their noses."

"I think there is little fear of that," said Tom, as he set off at a run.

It did not take him long to reach the spot where he had deposited the young girl, and as he took her up in his arms he was overjoyed to find that she was growing warm, as well as evincing other signs of returning animation.

Such a light weight as she was was nothing to Tom King, so he made his way with great swiftness to where he had left Turpin.

"Is all well?" the latter asked, as he got within speaking distance.

"Yes, she lives, and I do not doubt, if we can only succeed in reaching a place of shelter, that she will quite recover herself."

"I am glad to hear that—very! It appears to me we shall be likeliest to attain our object by keeping along the coast, since it is hardly possible for us to proceed far without finding a fisherman's hut."

"Very well, then. Come on at once, though I must say I had thought of finding her a more comfortable abiding place—a farmhouse, for instance."

"That would undoubtedly be better, but the nearest one may be several miles from here, and I think it most imperatively necessary that you should take her to the first place we find."

"It is—it is. These wet clothes ought to be removed with as little delay as possible."

With such talk as this, which seemed to cheat the distance, our friends walked rapidly along the sands in the hope of finding a place for the child—the only

living thing that remained to tell what ship it was that was wrecked, and to what port she was bound.

It was quite half-an-hour, though, before they came in sight of a habitation.

And then it could scarcely be called such, though it indicated the proximity of a dwelling.

It was a windmill, and at least a mile distant.

"That will be the place," said Turpin; "give me the child, and you can rest your arms a bit. That's it. Now on we go."

The little girl was hurried into Dick's arms, and then the highwaymen, leaving the course they were taking for one at right angles on the left of it, continued their way with unabated speed.

Every moment they knew might be precious to the young thing's life.

The road was toilsome, for it rose very rapidly; in fact the windmill was upon the ridge of a hill.

By changing their burden frequently, however, they managed to get on pretty well.

As they fully expected, they found as they drew nearer that there was a neat little cottage adjoining the mill. It was surrounded by a large and well-cultivated garden.

From the exterior appearance of the place generally, the two highwaymen formed a favourable opinion of the inhabitants.

Numberless flowers, of every imaginable hue, were blooming everywhere.

Order and neatness were observable in all things.

Such signs as these would enable anyone to come to a pretty correct conclusion that the occupants were what the outside of the house showed they were.

It was a relief when they reached the pretty green palisade with which the garden was environed.

Tom King was carrying the child.

Dick pushed open the little gate.

It made a slight sound as it turned upon its hinges, upon hearing which, some one, who was within, came to the doorstep.

The door itself was wide open, and Dick, as he strode along the neatly kept gravel path, caught a glimpse of one of the cleanest and prettiest little rooms that ever he remembered meeting with.

It was a woman who came to the door.

The morning sun was now shining brightly, and she had to shade her eyes with her hands before she could precisely tell who was coming.

She was young and graceful-looking, with a countenance pleasing in the extreme.

Upon, however, perceiving our friends, she gave a shriek of alarm, and retreated hastily into the house.

Their appearance terrified her.

And well it might, for the proceedings of the night had made them look rather ferocious individuals.

Her cry, however, brought another person on the scene.

This was the miller, who emerged suddenly from a little door in the mill itself.

Ha, too, was young, with a frank-looking, good-tempered countenance.

Evidently he was the husband of the woman who had made such a brief appearance at the cottage door.

"Hilloa, there! Dang it all, who be ye, what do ye want, frightening my Fanny in that way, eh? Who be ye, I say? What dost thee want?"

"Your assistance," said Turpin, in a gentle voice. "Your assistance, to restore this little girl to life. We picked her up insensible on the beach."

"Eh? what?" said the miller, hastening towards them. "God bless my life! What a pretty little thing! How nation pale and death-like too she be! Here Fanny—Fanny, come hither! thee be'est wanted."

Reassured by her husband's voice, the woman again appeared.

Our friends were standing just inside the porch.

"Look here, Fanny, lass, these gemmen here were on the coast during the storm last night—and an awful storm it were—and they a' picked up this little girl here. They do say she's alive, but she looks more like death than life, a sight!"

"Nevertheless," said Tom King, "she is alive, or, at all events, was a little while back, and if you will only take off her wet clothes, and put her in a warm bath, I darsay she will come round. Will you do this? I will pay you well for your trouble."

The womanly sympathies of the honest miller's wife were immediately enlisted in favour of the little girl, but when Tom spoke of paying her for what she did, she drew back with an offended air.

"We don't want to be paid for acting like Christians; but if it is in our power, we will do what we can towards reviving the dear little thing."

"I am very glad to hear you make such a remark," said Tom, handing his burden to her, "very glad. It confirms me in the good opinion I had formed of you."

A pleased look came over the good woman's face as she heard these words, and so there did over her husband's too.

But, having once taken the child, she did not linger, but hurried into the house with her.

"Dang it!" said the miller, grasping Tom and Dick alternately by the hand, "you're the right sort. Come in, come in, and try a bit of breakfast."

Our friends determined to accept this offer, and entered and soon had a most substantial and appetising fare set before them.

When the meal was over, the miller's wife entered the room in which they were sitting, and gave them the glad intelligence that the little girl had come back to life, and was then in bed fast asleep.

Upon hearing this, our friends gave the miller and his wife some further particulars about the storm and the wreck, and then begged the favour of a bed, so that they could rest themselves for an hour or two, which request was readily granted to them.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TURPIN AND KING ONCE MORE UPON THE ROAD—
THE SEARCH FOR BLACK BESS.

THE sun was but a few degrees above the horizon when Turpin and King descended to the kitchen of the mill cottage.

Very weary and very much exhausted were they when they threw themselves upon the bed, in the room to which they had been shown, and the delicious silence, as well as, perhaps, some somniferous quality of the air, made them sleep long and heavily.

But they got up feeling wonderfully refreshed.

After plentifully availing themselves in cold water they, as we have said, shortly before sunset made their way downstairs into the back room on the ground floor of the cottage.

They found upon the table a light and frugal repast, for the miller and his wife were just then about to partake of supper.

In tones of unfeigned welcome did the miller greet our friends, and request them to seat themselves at the table.

This they were nothing loth to do, besides which they did not want to leave until they had learned some additional particulars respecting the child King had saved, and this would give them an opportunity of doing so.

They were saved the trouble of asking the question, for the miller said—

"Dang it! but she be all right, tho' she did look so corpus like! Missus ha' spoken to her. Tell the gemmen what she said, Fanny."

"It were not much, sirs," said the miller's wife, "except she told me her name was Susan, and cried very much for her uncle and her brother."

"Did you ask her the name of the ship?"

"I did, sir."

"And what did she say it was?"

"A very curious name, but she took the trouble to spell it to I."

"What was it?"

"I recollect quite well. She said R-a-n-e-d-e-e-r, *Raneder*."

"The *Raneder*," said Tom, "then we shall be able to find out all about her; for, though it is not an uncommon name for a ship, yet the mode of spelling it is peculiar, though I believe, correct. However, it will, I doubt not, enable us to identify the vessel."

"And did she say no more?"

"No; I would not let her, for even that little exertion quite knocked her over; so I told her to go to sleep, which she did, and is sleeping now."

"Thanks," said Tom, rising from the table. "It is necessary that myself and friend should leave here now at

once, as important business calls us away; but rest assured no long time will elapse before you see us here again. In the meantime do not be offended with me for offering you this purse of sovereigns. To me they are no object. I can spare them easily, and without being sensible of their loss."

The miller opened his mouth to remonstrate, but King waved his hand and went on.

"It will be impossible for you to have this little girl here without incurring numberless expenses, which, I am sure, I can better afford than you. Do not look upon it as being paid for your charitable conduct, but rather consider it as I should wish to have this chance of being charitable."

Nine sentences out of every ten the miller uttered commenced with two words, and the one in reply to Tom King's observations was no exception to the habit he had fallen into.

"Dang it!"

Those were the two words.

"Dang it!" he said. "What you say sounds fair enough, and may be if I was in your place I should want to do the same; so we'll say no more about it. The little thing shall want for nothing while she is under my roof, bless her pretty face and beautiful golden hair. I'll take good care of that. We've got no children of our own, though many's the time we've grieved over it. However, here we are with one, and so long as she chooses, here she will find a home."

"You are a downright honest, good-hearted fellow," said Tom King, warmly pressing the miller's huge rough hand with undisguised admiration. "I wish there were more such in the world. However, no matter. It strikes me you will have a chance of keeping your word; for, to the best of my belief, every one else on board the ill-fated vessel perished."

Tom could not repress a shudder as he thought upon the means.

And, now," said Turpin, breaking the rather awkward pause which ensued, "we must be going. Look, the sun is quite set now, and soon darkness will close around us."

"It is even so," said Tom King. "Farewell for the present, my faithful friends. Rely upon it we shall not be long ere we return, for I am anxious to speak to the child I have saved, and look again at her beautiful face. While I am gone I shall make every inquiry about the vessel, the name of which I am not likely to forget. Farewell."

He wrung the hands of the miller and his wife as he spoke, and passed out of the door into the garden.

"Farewell," said Turpin, shaking hands with them likewise, "and accept our thanks for all you have this night done for us."

So saying, he rejoined his friend.

They passed together out of the little wooden gate, and turned towards Durley Chine, which was still distinctly visible.

Several times did they look back, and each time saw the miller and his wife wave their hands after them.

"There," said King, as they came to a bend in the road which hid the mill-cottage from their sight; "under that roof are two of the best natures that ever drew the breath of life."

"I firmly believe it, and we ought to think ourselves fortunate in the extreme in finding such an asylum for the girl, in whom I feel as warm an interest as you do yourself."

"I am not afraid to leave her in their care; and now, knowing she is safe, what shall be our next plan of operations?"

"Before we can think of that, we must re-enter the deserted grounds surrounding Durley Chine, and find the mare Black Bess! You, too, will require a steed. You must look about for one."

"I must, and I only hope that I shall chance upon a good one."

At this moment they reached the summit of a little hill, and, ere they descended it, they paused a moment to regain their breath and look around them.

The twilight was only deep enough to render indistinct the more distant objects in the landscape, for many a mile all things were plainly visible.

Their gaze lingered longest on the cottage adjoining the mill.

The worthy couple were still outside the porch, and it seemed as if they could still see their friends were looking in that direction, for they again waved their hands.

"Forward!" said Turpin, "do not let us waste any more time. I am most anxious to reach Durley Chine before night closes in."

"We shall easily be able to do that, for twenty minutes walking will take us there. But, above all, let us be cautious that no one sees us enter."

"I do not think we need fear that. Really, the place seems almost uninhabited. With the exception of the miller and his wife, we have not met a creature."

"I am aware of it, but we have not come far. As for our not seeing anyone on our way to the mill, I think nothing of it. It was an hour when but few people are abroad. Even London would be deserted."

"But look, we are destined to see somebody, at all events. What a cloud of dust there is at the end of the road yonder to be sure. Whatever can it be coming?"

"I have no idea!"

"Nor I; what puzzles me though, is that the ground should have dried so soon after the storm!"

"Then there is nothing at all wonderful in that, if you take into consideration the nature of the soil; you see it is of a calcareous or chalky nature, like the caverns, and wet is greedily absorbed by it, so that when the rain has ceased the surface soon gets dry."

"Oh! that is it. Well, I always look to you for explanations of things of that sort. I am not such a scholar as you."

Tom laughed at this remark, and said—

"My pretensions to the title of scholar are very slight indeed. I am, though, puzzled beyond measure to know what can be approaching to raise such a cloud of dust."

The elevated position in which our friends were, enabled them to see for a long distance ahead.

Considerably more than a mile off was a dense cloud of dust, and what caused it they would have given no trifle to know.

That it approached them was evident.

Some minutes were spent in fruitless speculation, and then Turpin, struck with a sudden idea, flung himself down on the roadway, placing his ear to the earth.

It was a wonder he had not thought of this before.

He did not remain in this position a moment, but sprang again to his feet.

"What do you make of it now?" asked Tom King.

"I am almost as much puzzled as I was before," was the reply. "A large number of horses are approaching."

"I daresay, now," said Tom, with a laugh, "it is a drove of horses going to market."

"That's it! Yet no! Stop! It isn't!"

"Why not?"

"It's the wrong time in the day; people wouldn't be taking their horses to market at this hour in the evening."

"No more they would. That is a little circumstance which did not occur to me when I spoke."

Turpin again placed his ear to the ground.

"You are altogether wrong," he said, when he rose. "They are horsemen, and coming along at a sharp trot."

"Horsemen! I am more puzzled than before. What can they be doing?"

"Goodness knows! But anyhow I think the most prudent course for us to pursue would be to leave the road, and take to the meadows. We shall then be able to see without being seen."

"So we shall; and here, as if it was made on purpose, is a gap in the hedge, which will answer our purpose most admirably."

The two friends immediately crossed the ditch which interposed between them and the bank of sloping earth upon which the hedge was planted, and then got through the gap into a field beyond.

The grass in this field had been suffered to grow a prodigious height, and as they found they made a loud rustling noise in their progress, they stopped, and lying down full length, peeped through the interstices of the hedge row.

Nearer, nearer—plainer, plainer—tump, tump—came the sound of horses' hoofs.

Who can they be that are coming?

At last, and just as our friends found their patience

exhausted, the foremost of the band of horsemen came in sight.

He was quickly followed by the remainder, who dashed past our friends at a sharp trot.

"Why, bless my heart alive!" ejaculated Turpin, when the last horseman had passed them, "I be hanged if it is not a troop of dragoons! What on earth can they want here, and trotting along at such a rate as that? Something's up somewhere beyond a doubt."

CHAPTER LXXV.

TURPIN AND KING LEAVE THE GUARD, AND ENTER DURLEY PARK.

SITUATED as our friends were, that is to say, at war with everybody, it became a necessity to take cognizance of everything that occurred, and it had grown into a habit with them to consider that when anything of an unusual character happened, it had a special reference to them.

So, on this occasion, the circumstance of a troop of dragoons passing along the highway filled them with speculation.

But not for one moment did they dream of the imminent danger in which they were.

Little did they think what a fortunate thing it was that they had been prompted by caution to hide behind the hedge while the cavalcade passed.

The fact of the matter was, that the body of soldiers which they had seen, was but one of several other companies who had been sent out with strict injunctions to scour the country in all directions for the notorious and audacious highwaymen, Richard Turpin and Thomas King.

Great, indeed, was their peril, but they knew it not.

Could it but have been whispered to them what alarming and effective measures had been taken for their apprehension, how they would have hastened to the sea-shore, from which they were at so short a distance, and, hiring a vessel of some kind, have crossed over to France.

But alas! there was nothing to warn them but their own perceptions.

The reader will remember what a series of daring deeds they had committed before taking refuge at Durley Chine, which certainly had the effect of baffling their foes, though not throwing them off the hunt.

Firstly, there was the robbery of the lord mayor's coup.

Secondly, the execution of Sir Theodore Houghton.

Thirdly, stopping the western coach.

Fourthly, the robbery of Captain Nidget, and

Finally, the defeat of the officers in the New Forest.

This was a deed which, as Dick had rightly conjectured, would make the country too hot to hold them.

But when he made this reflection, he little thought such vigorous steps would be taken to bring him and his comrades to justice.

The rewards were doubled.

Police-officers without number made inquiries in every possible direction.

They had been traced to the borders of the New Forest, but beyond that place there was nothing to serve them for a guide.

But what was looked upon as being quite certain to entail their capture was, that from sunset to sunrise, all the highroads were patrolled by companies of cavalry soldiers, whose orders were to keep a sharp look-out, and if they saw the highwaymen to make them prisoners—alive if possible, in order that they might suffer judicially for the crimes of which they had been guilty. But rather than allow them to escape on these grounds, they were to take their lives without hesitation.

For a full week had these measures been actively in operation, but without achieving the desired effect, for, as the reader knows full well, they were, during that period, either in the mansion at Durley Chine or the caverns beneath it, where it would have been well if they had remained.

But it was the opinion of both that they had secluded themselves quite long enough to allow the noise their exploits would occasion to blow over.

But in this they made a grand mistake.

A very particular account of them had been given to all the men, who were told not to scruple to take any one prisoner who at all answered the description.

This was a glorious thing for the police, since it enabled them to have the appearance of doing a great deal.

But it was appearance only; for though on the average about fifty persons were had up daily on suspicion, yet it was in all cases satisfactorily proved that they had yet to get hold of the right men.

Still, for all that, it looked as though the police were in earnest, so, as usual, the people were pleased with, and deceived by, them.

From the fact of their having been traced to the vicinity of the deserted mansion, it naturally occurred to many that it must be there where they had taken refuge, and they asserted as much to the executors of Sir Ernest Dane, who were, however, inflexible, and would not permit any intrusion to be made, and the will of the deceased baronet disobeyed.

A close watch, however, was kept round the premises, and with this the executors could not interfere, nor indeed did they wish to do so.

This guard consisted of police-officers, all well armed, who were posted at short intervals all round the park palings.

But this, of course, produced no effect, or, at all events, had not done so as yet.

Still they did not suffer their vigilance to relax.

Thus, our friends were, in a manner of speaking, hemmed in in every direction, and let them turn whichever way they would, capture stared them in the face.

Of all this the highwaymen were completely ignorant. The only thing that called forth remark was the presence of the dragoons.

The thought was uppermost in the minds of all that it was just possible that troop had been sent out to apprehend them, and each waited for the other to make the suggestion, neither liking to be the first to broach the subject, so the consequence was it was not spoken at all.

Besides, were such the case, they had passed them, and the distance was every moment increasing.

What is easier than for them to continue their course along the road?

Nothing apparently.

They were not, however, aware of the extent to which the officers had carried their machinations.

If the thought did occur to them that this one troop was in search of them, they certainly did not for a moment dream that it was one of many who had all the same object in view.

There is something terrible in the idea of two persons being environed with such deeply-laid schemes for their destruction.

But so it was.

Then, as the reader is well aware, that when he knew the full extent of his danger, Turpin's mind rose equal to it; but here, in the present case, he was utterly unconscious that he was in any peril at all—certainly no more than he was every day accustomed to.

What is his errand now?

To enter Durley Park, and lead out Black Bess.

Such a thing would be utter madness did he know that people were on the watch, and adopted cautious and strategic measures accordingly; but set out with such an object, not dreaming that it was necessary to take any particular precaution, would be nothing short of sheer suicide.

It is very strange, but it nevertheless often happens, when we are most happy then are we nearest to sorrow, and when most confident of being safe to be in the greatest danger.

Such was the case with both our friends.

They left the meadow, and returned to the high-road.

Not a soul, or even a living creature of any kind, was in sight.

The dragoons were completely out of sight and hearing.

The pace they were going at was one that, without appearing so to do, got over a great deal of ground in a short time.

Then the sun sank suddenly behind the black mass of clouds that was piled up on the horizon.

A sudden obscurity overspread the scene.

A cool wind arose, and whistled mournfully amongst the foliage.

But, unheeding this, our friends walked rapidly along the road in the direction of Durley Chine.

It was Tom King who spoke, after a rather long interval of silence, during which both had been occupying their thoughts with trying to account for the presence of the dragoons.

But although this subject was topmost in his thoughts, yet Tom did not allude to it in any way.

"I very much regret," he said, "that we did not serve the remainder of the smugglers, or rather wreckers, as we did the chief and the other two. Such wretches ought not to be allowed to exist."

"I think we may rest satisfied with what we have done. They will be some time, I think, before they renew their frightful business; if, indeed, they ever do."

"Pho! pho! We have not dealt them a severe enough blow for that. I, for my part, feel pretty sure that before many days are over, they will begin again."

"Well, well, perhaps so. I shall, however, most certainly in a day or two revisit the mill cottage. Not only shall I be glad to see again its worthy inmates, but I am anxiously impatient to speak to the little girl. What did they say her name was?"

"Susan."

"Ay, Susan. She will be able, I hope, to give me some particulars about the vessel that was wrecked. Poor thing! she is the only one saved. What is to become of her? What will be her future fate?"

"You won't know that if you puzzle your brains for an hour. The best thing that can happen to her will be for the miller to adopt her as his own daughter."

"It will, if he will adopt her."

"You may depend he will be only too glad. Both have loving hearts. It seems strange that such people should be denied children of their own, as they appear to be."

By this time the glorious twilight had deepened into night, which was at once dark and moonless.

The greatest part of the distance to Durley Chine had now been passed over. The mansion was certainly not a quarter of a mile off.

More picturesque than ever did it look in the darkness, for it was outlined with great distinctness upon the lighter coloured sky behind it.

But all between the two highwaymen and the house itself was very dark indeed. No object at a distance of more than a few yards could be discerned.

Suddenly Turpin caught Tom King by the arm, arresting his footsteps.

At the same instant he pointed with his arm down the lane.

"Lights!" exclaimed Tom King, as he saw the object to which his companion directed his attention. "Moving lights. What can they mean?"

"That is it!"

"I can count five of them. They are moving along in a straight line towards the coast."

"They are. I cannot tell what the meaning of it is," said Dick to his companion, "but I can tell what it is."

"I think I can, too."

"It appears to me quite clear that some half-dozen men carrying lanterns are making their way either along the hedgerow or else along the palings of the park at Durley Chine."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

TURPIN AND KING ARE CHASED BY THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS.

"ALONG the park palings," iterated Tom King; "that's where they are, that's clear. Who can they be, eh?"

"I am as much at a loss to know that as I am to know their object."

"For my own part, I cannot help connecting those lights with the troop of dragoons we saw gallop past us a little while ago."

"The deuce, you can't; but look, they have stopped, and now there is as many again of them."

It was with increasing interest that our friends now strained forward to watch what was taking place.

The light of at least a dozen lanterns could now be seen flashing through the darkness: but the lights no longer moved; they were stationary.

Presently, however, they formed out into a straight line, and then divided in the centre, half going one way and half the other.

Then they observed, further, that as they went on one light was left behind; so that in a few minutes the line extended in an irregular line for a considerable distance, each light being an equal distance from the other—that distance being thirty or forty yards.

No sooner was this done than, as if by magic, every light became extinct.

Not the faintest gleam remained to show where they had been.

It is needless to say that all this filled our two friends with the most intense surprise.

Turpin drew a long breath.

"This is something very extraordinary," he said; "I can't make it out at all; can you, Tom?"

"No further than this, that I think it pretty evident those men who carry the lanterns have been placed as sentinels somewhere, and, from what I can see, apparently along the park palings."

"That is it, of course. I have it now, sure enough. You may depend, Tom, that in some way or other we have been tracked to Durley Chine, and that those men have been placed there to nab us as we leave it."

"Of course," said Tom King; "however was it that it did not occur to us before! Now I can see all plainly enough?"

"All what?"

"Why, those dragoons we saw trot down this lane are on the look out for us, in case we should not be in the mansion; and the others are either soldiers or police-officers, who have surrounded the park, for the executors of Sir Ernest would not, I am certain, listen either to their entering the grounds or search the house."

"Just so! Those lights, then, we may safely conclude, were carried by the relief guard, as I may call it."

"There can be little doubt of it; and now, such being the case—the roads watched by dragoons and the park surrounded by men—I think it pretty clear you must give up all idea of getting Black Bess in safety out of the grounds."

Turpin was silent for a few moments.

"The risk will be great, Tom," he said; "very great indeed, and yet"—

"Yet you would say you do not like the idea of leaving your mare where she is."

"I do not. Without her I can do nothing. But, my friend, I do not want to draw you into this extra trouble on my account, so let me beg of you to secrete yourself somewhere close at hand."

"While you make the attempt alone? Never! I am your friend, and it is not in my disposition to desert you because there happens to be a little danger."

"But, Tom, listen. You could do no good by accompanying me. Two persons would not be required for the job, so let me again ask you as a favour to let me carry out this little affair single-handed."

"I shall allow you to do nothing of the sort. I know I can be of use to you. Two heads are always better than one. I shall be deeply offended with you if you do not let me have my own way in this."

"You are a true friend, Tom," said Dick Turpin, pressing his hand. "Believe me, I shall indeed be most glad to have you with me. I did not wish to appear selfish in the matter, and that was why I pressed you to let me go alone; but, if you mean what you say"—

"I always say what I mean."

"I know you do, and therefore it is settled that you accompany me."

"It is."

"Very well, then, I would ask your advice."

"Upon how we are to proceed?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you puzzle me, for, to tell the truth, I hardly know what to advise. I think the first and best thing we can do is to creep forward with all possible caution, and then, I doubt not, circumstances will arise which will materially assist us."

"Come on, then."

"Does the plan meet with your approbation?"

"Perfectly."

"Then let us make our way towards the palings as stealthily as we can."

Nothing further was now said, but both the highwaymen proceeded to put their determination into execution.

After going about a couple of hundred yards they deemed it advisable to leave the highway, and take to the fields. So happening to see a gate they clambered over it.

They then found themselves in a meadow of very large size. In fact, in the darkness, they could see no bounds to it.

Still keeping in sight the angular roofs and picturesque-looking chimney-tops of the mansion, they struck across the grass, upon which, of course, their tread was all but noiseless.

Yet, so intensely silent was the whole of the place, that even here they were obliged to tread carefully, lest the creaking of their boots, or the jingling of their spurs, should attract attention towards them.

They at length came to a hedge which was so dense and high, that it formed an effectual barrier against their proceeding further; so, after assuring themselves that this was the fact, they were compelled to go along it until they found either a gap or a gate.

At the further extremity of the field they came to a stile, which they got over at once.

"I think it will be the wisest plan not to stray far from the path in future. We shall lose less ground by doing so, I'll warrant."

"Very likely. But come, one more field to take it, and then we shall reach the palisades; so I think the less we say now the better."

There was so much wisdom in this, that Turpin at once acquiesced in it.

In a few more minutes they could see the boundary of the park.

We have in a former chapter described it. It was in a stooping posture that our friends advanced. The least sound would be fatal to them.

Dimly, very dimly, they could see the figure of a man. He was standing quite motionless, and, as they fancied, in an attitude of listening.

What was to be done?

Both wished to speak, but dared not. Turpin caught hold of his companion by the coat, and motioned to him to lie flat upon the earth.

As it was out of his power to remonstrate or ask a question even as to his motive, Tom King complied.

Then Dick slowly and cautiously drew his sword from its sheath.

Its bright blade glistened slightly, but in drawing it Dick made no sound.

He placed the blade in his mouth, and held it firmly with his teeth.

Sinking then upon the earth, he, in a tortuous, snake-like manner, crept forward.

Tom King began to follow him, but Turpin made such an imperative gesture for him to remain, that he, perforce, obeyed.

Repugnant as it was to his mind, Dick had resolved upon the assassination of this man who stood so still at his post.

Unless he did he felt sure he must abandon all hope of regaining possession of his mare.

He considered that the end justified the means.

And yet, let us do him the justice to observe that, could he have hit upon any mode of accomplishing his purpose without taking this man's life, he would with the greatest alacrity have adopted it.

But there was none.

Therefore he, with all the subtlety of an Indian, crawled forward.

The officer was doomed.

But, as he stood there on guard, no thought of his imminent danger crossed his mind. Little did he dream that he was so near the end of his career—that the sands of his life were all but run out.

Then Dick adopted an expedient which completely answered his purpose.

He wished to distract the attention of the sentry from himself.

But, at the same time, he did not wish to attract the attention of another.

Dick took a small pebble in his hand.

Taking a careful aim, he threw it so as to fall about a dozen yards from the officer.

The slight noise it made as it reached the earth caught

Had he not been listening intently he would never have heard it, but the fact was he already fancied he could hear something.

He turned immediately in the direction where the stone fell, and carried his rifle to his shoulder.

In another moment he would have cried in a loud voice, "Who goes there?" but ere the words could reach his lips, Turpin had glided forward as swiftly and noiselessly as a spectre.

He drew himself up to his full height behind the sentinel.

Then, with a strange sickening sensation about his heart, he plunged his sword into the body of the officer.

He fell without a groan.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE DRAGOONS CAPTURE TOM KING, AND CONVEY HIM TO NEWGATE.

So far, then, our friends' perilous undertaking was crowned with success.

It was an anxious moment, while they waited, to learn whether the fall of the officer was heard by the next sentry.

But it did not appear that such was the case.

All was still.

Using the greatest caution, Tom King crept up to and rejoined his comrade.

Turpin held up his hand for him not to speak.

Then, turning round, he proceeded to examine the fence.

He was agreeably surprised to find that a huge chestnut tree, growing just inside the inclosure, projected a massive branch right over their heads.

It was some distance from the ground, it is true, but still not so high as to make it a sheer impossibility for them to reach it.

In fact, by the assistance of his comrade, Dick was enabled to grasp it with both hands.

After that the remainder was easy.

He drew himself up.

He found then that his weight so far bent the branch as to make it within reach of Tom's grasp.

In another moment he was beside him.

All this had been done with great celerity, and without the least alarm being given to the other sentries.

The highwaymen passed along the branch of the tree, and then dropped into the park.

They looked about them curiously.

Bess was nowhere in sight.

A peculiar whistle from Dick's lips would, however, be sufficient to bring her to his side; but this he did not dare give because of the dread of its reaching the officers' ears also.

They threaded their way through the park in silence, until at last they reached the shrubbery, where, it will be remembered, Dick tethered his mare.

When he did so he had taken pains to minutely observe the places, so he made his way to the particular tree without hesitation.

Bess was gone!

But as he was about to make some observation to his friend respecting her disappearance, there was a slight rustling among the trees.

He turned round suddenly, placing his hand upon his sword.

There was, however, no ground for alarm.

It was his mare, Black Bess.

She recognized Dick instantly, and exhibited her intense delight by caressing him much in the manner that a cat will do.

It would have been difficult to tell which was the most delighted of the two.

"Hilloa," said Tom King at this moment, but in a low tone of voice, "Hilloa, why, here is another!"

"Another what?"

"Another horse. Whose can it be? It is a very saddled and bridled."

"I am astonished. However came it here?"

"I don't know at all," replied Tom, who had been attentively looking at the strange horse's trappings, "but it evidently belongs to a police-officer. I can tell that by the harness."

"This, then, is a suspicious circumstance."



[THE DRAGOONS ESCORTING TOM KING INTO NEWGATE].

"This, for it certainly seems to point to the fact that officers are actually, in defiance of Sir Ernest's will, prowling about the grounds."

Tom looked anxiously around him as he spoke. But no living thing was in sight.

"I can scarcely think, from all I know of the circumstances," said Turpin, after a few minutes' anxious thought, "that it could be as you suppose. A dead man's wishes would not be suffered to be thus disregarded. I should rather incline to the belief that it is a horse belonging to one of the officers whom we overcame in the forest."

"By Jove! Dick, you have hit it this time," said Tom King, with great animation. "Horses have strange instincts, and I would wager my life this one has followed Bess hither."

This was a most probable supposition, and both agreed that it must be a correct one.

"I shall chance it, and appropriate him to my own use," said Tom, springing on to the strange horse's back,

while Turpin mounted his mare, "and there is another little circumstance in connection with it, and that is, supposing our conjecture about this horse to be right, there must be, somewhere in the palings, a place which a horse can leap."

"Egad! yes, I was thinking how we were to overcome that difficulty, and it has disappeared. Let us ride forward, and try if we cannot find this place."

So saying, they made their way to the palisades, and continued along them, taking care not to make a sound.

Presently they came upon a spot where the vegetation was more scanty, and where it was possible for a horse to leap.

Dick placed himself in a line with this place.

He seated himself firmly in the saddle, and gathered the reins in his hand.

"Now, Bess," he said, as he patted her gently and encouragingly upon the neck. "Over, mare—over."

With a sudden rush, Black Bess dashed onwards, and cleared the palings at a bound.

Tom King followed closely after him.

His horse, which was really an excellent one, inspired, doubtless, by the example of its companion, leaped over the fence in first-rate style.

But no sooner had they alighted than both highwaymen heard a loud shout, which was immediately succeeded by the discharge of a musket.

They had been seen and heard by one of the many sentinels posted round the park, who lost no time in giving the alarm to his comrades.

The gun was fired without any particular aim being taken, so neither of our friends were injured by it in the least.

Finding that they had alighted safely in the lane which skirted the park, they turned their horses' heads, and by every means in their power urged the animals onward.

The speed they made was prodigious.

But, nevertheless, they could tell by the flashing of lights here and there, and the sounds of many voices, that the alarm was spreading.

It was a lucky thing for Tom King, not only that he should have found a horse so opportunely, but that it should have turned out of so good a quality.

In fact, he succeeded in keeping up with Dick without having to use much exertion, and without the latter having to check the speed of his own mare.

And now, as they swept on at that fearful pace, the sentinels dashed forward to attempt to stay them, but they were only hurled to the earth for their pains.

We have said that one side of the lane was bordered by the park palisades. The other side was bounded by a hedge of holly-trees of most luxuriant growth.

A little further on the lane would round to the right.

In a few moments both highwaymen reached this bend.

They galloped round it without slackening their pace, and then drew up with great abruptness.

Completely blocking up the lane and forming a most effectual barrier to their progress was the troop of dragoons they had seen about an hour before.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE DRAGOONS HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE WITH THEIR PRISONER.

So very suddenly and unexpectedly did this sight come upon them that, beyond having presence of mind sufficient to pull up their horses, they lost all self-possession.

They were, however, quickly restored to their senses by hearing a loud voice say—

"Here they are. Upon them! Charge! Take them prisoners—alive if possible, if not, dead!"

These words were immediately followed by the trampling of horses' hoofs and the clashing of weapons and accoutrements, as the dragoons prepared to obey their officer's commands.

Dick Turpin was the first to recover himself, and, turning his mare round, he shouted—

"Fly, Tom," he said, "we must run for it. To attempt for a moment to make a stand against a troop of soldiers would be the extreme of madness. Spur your steed, my friend, your life depends upon his fleetness."

As he uttered these words, Turpin just grazed the flank of Black Bess with his spur, and she sped along with a swiftness which no other horse could hope to equal.

"Make ready! Present!" cried the officer in command of the dragoons, as he saw his prey turn round and set off at such a headlong speed. "Present! Fire!"

The rattling discharge of about twenty muskets succeeded his command.

But our friends, luckily, had just turned the bend in the lane, so the bullets expended themselves fruitlessly among the trees.

Had it not been for this circumstance the highwaymen must have been swept from the face of the earth.

As it was they were not injured in the least.

Perceiving that this volley had been without result, the officer gave the order to follow in pursuit.

The regular beat of their hoofs reached the ears of Dick Turpin and Tom King with greater plainness than was either pleasant or desirable.

Despite the efforts which Tom's steed made to keep up with Black Bess, he every moment fell further and further into the rear. As yet, however, the distance between the two was inconsiderable.

They did not look behind them, but they could well be a wild disorderly sort of shout, that the dragoons had then once more in view.

So prompt had been their pursuit, and so great the rate at which they came, that Turpin and King were scarcely out of the range of their guns.

Again they heard the word given to fire.

Upon the impulse of the moment Dick plunged both his spurs into the sides of his mare.

Unused altogether to such treatment, she gave a snort of mingled rage and pain, and then set forward at a speed so tremendous, that Turpin had the greatest possible difficulty in keeping his seat.

Then came the loud report of the fire-arms.

So soon as he heard the sound, Dick felt sure he was unhurt, and he turned round to look to the safety of his comrade.

Then for the first time he noticed that he was not near him.

Unheeding the result he slackened speed, and, turning round in his saddle, took a brief but searching glance behind him.

A pang shot through his heart as he saw what had taken place.

Tom King's horse had been wounded by the last discharge, and had become maddened and ungovernable with pain.

Like some tortured insect he spun round for a moment or two, and then galloped forward in the opposite direction, so that a minute or two must inevitably bring Tom into collision with his foes.

He saw his frightful danger, and sought to avoid it, but in vain.

The dragoons were for a moment thrown into confusion at thus seeing one of the men they were chasing turn round and gallop recklessly towards them.

But it was only for a second.

They halted and formed in a line three deep across the lane.

On came Tom's horse, blind to all before it.

King set his teeth and drew his sword, determined not to surrender without making an effort for his liberty.

But it was quite useless.

His horse was suddenly brought to a stand still, and he himself, surrounded by the troop, was, by numerous hands, dragged from his saddle, and, with great rapidity and dexterity, securely bound.

Tom King was a prisoner.

Beyond all hope or prospect of escape or rescue.

This was what sent a pang through Dick's heart when he turned and looked behind him.

Naturally enough, his first impulse was to ride to the rescue of his friend.

But before he could put his resolve into execution, he saw in a moment the utter uselessness of such an attempt.

How could he hope, single-handed, to cope successfully with so large a body of well-armed men?

The idea was absurd.

Clearly, all that remained for him to do was to seek his own safety by instantaneous flight.

This course, however, he was most loath to adopt, for would it not look like deserting his friend?

But then again there shot across his mind the thought that, were he free, he could do much towards aiding his comrade to escape; but if he, too, out of a false feeling of generosity, was to suffer himself to be captured, what hope was there for either?

None.

With the rapidity of lightning did these thoughts pass through Turpin's mind, and without apparently having had time to reflect and decide upon the course he ought to take, he again urged Bess forward at the top of her speed.

Encumbered with their prisoner, Dick reasonably enough indulged in the hope that he should before long distance them.

He was startled at this moment by another discharge from the carbines of the dragoons, and he heard several bullets whistle by in most unpleasant proximity to his head.

Then a numb sensation in his left arm told him that one of the shots had taken effect.

"You shall have one in return for that," he said, drawing a pistol from his belt.

Without drawing rein he again looked behind him, and holding out the pistol at arm's length, took as good an aim as under the circumstances he possibly could, and fired.

Whether the shot was or was not effective he did not stay to see, but changing the reins from his left to his right hand, occupied himself entirely in seeking his escape.

Oh, on, like the very wind he went, but still the dragoons kept most perseveringly in the rear.

And now, to Dick's chagrin, he saw, as he looked before him, that night was going, and day about to dawn, for a faint, slate-coloured light began to fall upon the various objects around him, imparting in many instances a ghostly look to the tall trees.

This, however, was a thing over which he could have no possible control.

Most devoutly though did he wish that darkness would have continued an hour or so longer, it would have been of such material aid to him.

Very soon was the park of Durlay Chine left behind him, and now, on both sides of the lane, were nothing but hedgerows, so high and so thick that he could see neither over or through them.

In this way another mile was passed over.

On—on, as far as he could see, the lane had precisely the same appearance.

Just within sight and hearing was the troop of dragoons.

"Confound them and the place, too," said Dick, in a tone of great vexation. "They are most excellently mounted, and come along at a surprising rate, and this road is like a tunnel, there is no means of leaving it."

Regrets could avail nothing.

To add to the inconvenience of the place, he found the ground rose rapidly, causing a great diminution in the speed, which, up to this moment, his mare had been making.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

ESQUIRE EDELTON AND HIS DAUGHTER ANNIE MAKE A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

FROM the look of the sky, Dick could tell that he was proceeding in as nearly as possible an easterly direction.

His ignorance of the topography of the place destroyed his confidence, for he knew not how soon he might reach some large town.

But if the ascent he was now making did hinder him, it had the effect of hindering his pursuers in an equal degree, so that after all matters remained much about the same.

A little more than five minutes brought Dick in view of the top of the hill.

From the clearness with which it was defined, he came to the conclusion that on the other side the descent must be very abrupt indeed, much more so than the side he was upon.

But what is amiss?

Dick suddenly brings Black Bess to a stand.

He looks eagerly about him.

Can it be possible that the dragoons have relinquished the chase?

Or is it that he has distanced them?

In neither case would he have pulled up with so much abruptness.

Lower down the hill, too, can be seen the troop of dragoons pushing along with unobscured speed.

What on earth, then, could be Dick's motive for behaving as though it was his desire to be taken prisoner?

It was this.

As he had looked before him at the top of the hill he saw suddenly arise as though from the ground another troop of dragoons, similar in appearance to those by whom he was chased, but in greater force.

They saw him, evidently, for they had been travelling only at a walking pace; but now they came on at a full gallop.

And so when he saw this Dick did the only thing he could do, and that was to come to a standstill.

To have kept in motion would only bring his enemies closer upon him.

Turpin gave himself up to anxious thought.

For the first time he became cognizant of the fact that there had been more than one troop sent out to capture him.

He glanced around him despairingly.

Escape there seemed to be none.

A troop of soldiers before him.

A troop of soldiers behind him.

On either side the tallest hedgerows he ever remembered to have seen.

He might just as well have been in a tube.

There was little or no time for deliberation, however. The officers neared him with great rapidity, and in a minute or so would be within musket range.

Truly was Turpin's position most desperate.

"I shall be taken now, that's quite certain," he said; "and then farewell to all hopes of rescuing Tom. We shall swing together next Monday, without a doubt. The only way there is of leaving the lane is by jumping the hedge, and that I am sure is too high, even for Bess."

The jangling of the weapons and ornaments which the soldiers carried, now mingled with the horses' measured tread.

"I won't give up unresistingly," said Dick. "I will try the hedge. If I miss it, I can't possibly be any worse off than I am now, while there is every chance of my being better."

As he uttered these words Dick backed his mare as far as he could to one side of the lane, and faced the hedge on the other.

It was apparent in a moment that the sagacious creature comprehended fully what was required of her, but she seemed by her way to show that she considered the hedge too high, even for her to leap.

But Turpin was rendered desperate at so immediate a prospect of capture and death, and, unheeding the remonstrance, as one might call it, of his mare, he took a firm hold, and then patting her encouragingly upon the back, made her essay the, to every appearance, impossible leap.

For the first time since he had had her in his possession did Black Bess refuse to obey him.

She went half way across the lane, and then swerved.

Dick forced her back to her former position. Every second thus lost was of the most inestimable importance to him.

Finding her master determined, Black Bess once more turned towards the edge.

Then, with a rush and a bound, she was over.

But not clearly.

Her hind legs caught in the hedge, and both horse and rider rolled over and over into a field.

For a minute or so, Turpin was entirely deprived of consciousness, so that he did not hear the cry that the dragoons set up.

It was one compounded of rage, mortification, disappointment, and admiration.

Happily for the safety of Dick's bones, the meadow into which he alighted was composed of soft and stoncleless earth.

He recovered the use of his faculties very quickly, and sprang to his feet.

Bess was standing close behind him.

He sprang without delay into the saddle, and shaping his course across the field at right angles to the lane, was soon beyond the danger of immediate capture.

The dragoons, who had made up their minds that the capture of Turpin was inevitable, were enraged beyond measure at his unanticipated escape.

The hedge over which Black Bess had just managed to leap was of so extraordinary a height, and there was so little room for a run before leaping it, that not one of them made the smallest attempt at following him.

The other dragoons who had been pursuing Dick noted their appearance on the scene, looking tired and anxious.

From the bottom of his heart old Tom King rejoiced that his old comrade had been so lucky as to get off, though he himself had not been similarly fortunate.

Some very earnest conversation now took place between the officers in command of the two troops.

At length it was determined that the one which had Tom King prisoner, was, without further delay, to make its way to London.

The others would retrace their steps to the top of the hill, at which place they thought they should be able to get into the meadows.

But before they could do this Dick had got such a start that it was quite futile to think of overtaking him.

His progress, however, across the fields was not quite so swift as he could have wished, for the ground was sopping from the recent rain.

Bess, too, could not but be exhausted after the efforts she had made, and the heaviness of the ground affected her more than it ordinarily would have done.

After crossing a couple of meadows he came to a large plot of ploughed land.

His first thought was to cross this, but on further consideration he concluded it would be better to take to the firm beaten path which skirted it.

It would, besides, be less fatiguing to his mare, and he knew that upon her depended his chance of safety.

It is very probable, too, that this, although much further, would not take near so long.

At the other side of the field Dick found a gate which led into one of the most charming and beautiful lanes he had ever, in the course of his varied experience, seen.

Perhaps, too, the fresh pure air of the early morning made it appear more beautiful than at other times.

The sky was cloudless, and the sun had got sufficiently high up in the heavens to shed upon all things a mellow, yet rosy light.

Numberless birds were singing sweetly in the tall trees on either side of the lane, while a lark that had just risen was mounting rapidly upwards, his clear and musical notes making themselves audible above all others.

Not the least charm about this place was the air of entire repose which pervaded it. To have been there one would have thought that no such things as war and strife could have existence.

So much charmed was Dick with the appearance of this lane, the melody of the birds, and the delicious silence, that he sat still on his mare for a minute or two, lost in admiration, without making the least attempt to open the gate.

CHAPTER LXXX.

DICK TURPIN FOR A TIME GETS INTO VERY COMFORTABLE QUARTERS.

Dick dismounted.

No sooner, however, did his feet touch the earth than such a sudden feeling of faintness came over him that he reeled, staggered, and would have fallen had it not been for the fact that he clutched tight hold of the top bar of the gate.

He was at a loss for a little while to account for this, when, on moving his arm, he recollected the wound he had received, but which in the whirl of exciting events which had since succeeded he had forgotten.

By a great effort he shook off the weakness he felt, and then bandaged his arm.

This now, however, was scarcely requisite, for the hemorrhage had ceased in consequence of the blood having coagulated over the orifice of the wound. Still it could do it no harm.

Before leaving the smuggler's cave he had taken the precaution to stow into the pocket of his coat a small bottle of brandy.

Recollecting having done this he produced it, and pulling out the cork with his teeth took a long draught.

The fiery, unadulterated spirit seemed to fill him with new life so soon as the first uncomfortable sensation of having drank so much at one time had passed away.

Then he bethought himself of the object for which he had dismounted, which was to try if he could open the gate.

He was well pleased to find it was only secured by a piece of wood being stuck through the staple instead of a lock, so withdrawing this the gate swung open at once.

Taking Bess by the bridle he led her through it, and fastened it in the way he had found it, for he did not wish so glaring an index as an open gate to show the route he had taken.

He listened then very intently for nearly two minutes, but he could hear nothing whatever of his pursuers the dragoons.

Not was he likely to do so, for they would have to make

a considerable circuit to reach the very pretty verdant lane in which he now stood.

But of this fact Turpin was ignorant.

Apparently the lane was one but little travelled, for there were not ruts in it, and except in the very middle it was completely overgrown with short crisp grass.

Dick looked both up and down this lane, but it was so suspicious that he could see only a little way.

"I must mount and be off," he said, "though this place is charming enough to make anyone linger in it. My foes are too close at hand for it to be at all safe. In fact, how it is I hear nothing of them I can't very well make out."

As he pronounced these words, Dick, with a good deal of trouble mounted his mare, for his left arm being quite useless, rendered such a thing rather difficult.

At length he succeeded.

Again he paused to listen, but still he could hear no sounds indicative of the proximity of his foes.

It then became rather a nice question with him as to which direction he should take.

"I must find shelter somewhere," he said. "I cannot tell how much my arm may be injured, and neglect may make what would otherwise be but a trifling wound a dangerous one. Bess, too, I can tell will be the better for a rest."

"And yet," he added, "I hardly know whether, under the circumstances, it will be safe. However, I will try this way, let it be how it may."

So saying he turned to the right.

At a gentle trot, Bess made her way along this lane, her footsteps being all but inaudible upon the short grass in the road.

He turned the corner of the lane, and as he did so he happened to get into such a position that the sun's rays fell upon him.

They were warm and refreshing, and he felt grateful for them.

Nevertheless, he did not halt, but turned round another bend in the lane, which then for more than half-a-mile stretched out before him in a straight line.

Then he noticed that over the palings on the left hand side of the lane were some very tastefully and beautifully laid out grounds evidently belonging to a gentleman's mansion.

Then some little distance further on he saw what he took to be the entrance gates, and just over the tree-tops peeped the roofs and chimneys of a lodge.

The mansion itself however was not visible.

Dick rode on rather leisurely, for where he now stood he could see for a long way in the direction from whence his pursuers would have to come.

None of them were in sight.

Just then Dick, having nearly reached the lodge gates, turned his gaze from the meadows on his right to the road before him.

Then he noticed that which he had certainly not seen before.

This was a young and beautiful girl.

Her age could not certainly have been more than eighteen, yet her form had arrived at full maturity. She was very fair, with eyes of a grayish blue, transparent, rosy cheeks, full lips, and a profusion of bright golden hair, which hung in tiny rippling curls over her shoulders.

She wore no covering upon her head, and had only a thin shawl to shield her from the keen morning air.

For full half a minute did Dick continue, like one spell-bound, gazing upon this vision of beauty.

Unconsciously he checked the speed of his mare, who now proceeded at a walking pace only.

The young girl was standing with her head bent towards him, and there was upon her pretty countenance such a lovely expression of mingled hope and fear, that Dick was completely charmed.

No one would have needed a second glance at her amiable countenance, and thoughtful, earnest-looking eyes to have been assured that none but the kindest sentiments had a home in her bosom.

It was evident she was looking narrowly at Dick, though why he should be the special object of her attention he could form no idea.

He determined, however, so prepossessed was he by her appearance, to implore her to grant him a few hours' shelter, in order that his wound should be attended to

"She is not the one to refuse me, I am sure," he muttered, "and so here goes to try."

So saying he dismounted from his mare, and taking her by the bridle, led her over the few yards that intervened between him and the fair young girl.

But, to his intense astonishment, before he had well made one step towards her she uttered a faint cry, which admitted of but one interpretation.

Joy.

Then, with this cry upon her lips, she sprang forward, and, extending her arms, clasped Dick round the neck; then kissing him lightly on the cheek, laid her head upon his shoulder.

To say Dick was astounded would be to convey to the mind of the reader a very faint and imperfect idea of his feelings just at that moment.

It was most mysterious.

Most incomprehensible.

But in the event of such an occurrence as the one we have just described, it would not have been in human nature not to in some way respond to such a welcome.

It certainly was not in Dick's.

In the most natural manner imaginable he encircled the form of the young girl with one arm, and, bending down his head, kissed the sweet, ripe lips which were turned quite lovingly towards him.

And as he did this, Turpin noticed what perfect happiness overspread her countenance.

Decidedly there was a mystery here.

But the first words the girl uttered dissipated it.

Gently disengaging herself from Dick's embrace, she looked up with a smile of ineffable sweetness into his face.

"Oh! Percy, dear," she said, "I am so glad you have come. We received your letter to say that you should reach home last night, and when night came without bringing you with it we grew so anxious and alarmed. Father has not been to bed all night, nor has mother, nor have I. It was some strange feeling or other which prompted me to run down to the lodge gates, and then to my joy I saw you in the distance. Oh! Percy, I am so—so happy."

The young girl again let her hand fall upon Dick's breast, but this time she burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh! the deuce!" thought Turpin, as he at once divined the mystery of the whole affair. "The deuce! She takes me for somebody else, that's quite clear. How in the world am I to get out of this scrape, I should like to know?"

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE TROOP OF DRAGONS BY NO MEANS RELAX IN THEIR ENDEAVOURS TO CAPTURE DICK TURPIN.

The tears which the young girl now so freely shed were clearly tears of joy, so Dick suffered them to flow on unchecked, while he took the opportunity to make up his mind to some particular plan of action.

Although what the girl had said was rather vague as concerned details, yet Dick saw plainly enough that he had been mistaken for some one, but whether that some one was a lover or a brother he could not for the life of him determine.

That it was one or the other there was not much room to doubt.

Then the young girl brushed away her tears, and said, with a laugh—

"How foolish of me to cry, to be sure! But don't be angry with me and chide me, as you used to before you went to India! But what makes you so strange, Percy? You don't seem at all glad to see me. I judged you by myself, and thought you would be overjoyed."

Dick was sorely puzzled what to say or do.

Should he at once dispel the girl's illusion, or should he endeavour to continue it?

He had scarcely any time to decide, for the girl was looking closely at him and wondering at his silence.

Dick felt somehow that it would be most conducive to his own safety to encourage the girl in her mistake.

But then he thought again what many difficulties he would have to contend with when he reached the mansion, and might there not be some one there with keen enough eyes to discover the cheat, and then would not his position be a dangerous one?

But his thoughts and speculations were instantly put to flight by the next words which came from his companion's lips.

"How very much you have altered, Percy. Not only in your manners and voice, but in your very features. Why if I did not know it was you I should hardly recognize you."

"That's not very remarkable," said Dick, who felt it imperative to make a remark of some kind. "In fact it's not remarkable at all."

In this remark Dick was quite right, as he said to himself—

"It would have been very remarkable if she had."

"I suppose not," said the young girl; "a seven years' absence makes a great difference in any one, doesn't it, Percy? and especially when that seven years has been spent in the army in India."

"Why yes, as you say," said Dick, who, as the reader will perceive, had made up his mind to keep up the delusion as long and as well as he could, "why yes, there is a great change in yourself even from what there was when I went away. You were quite a child then, and now you are a woman."

"Ah! yes, so I am. But you, Percy, have grown so much older."

"All I want to know," thought Dick, to himself, "is what relation I stand in to her, or supposed to stand in, rather. I can't be her brother, she is a great deal too affectionate for that. I can't be her lover, I think, or else she would be more reserved. How puzzling, to be sure. No! I have it; I ought to have thought of that before—I must be her cousin!"

The moment this thought found a place in Dick's mind, everything that had passed tended to confirm it, and he felt quite sure that he was right. All could be explained by supposing that the person whose arrival was so anxiously expected was her cousin.

In fact, Dick felt so certain that he ventured to assert as much.

He would have been glad to have learned her name, but that there was at present no means of knowing.

"And have you thought much about your cousin?" he inquired.

"What made you ask that question?" she said, in great surprise.

"I felt anxious to know," said Dick.

"My cousin! Who do you mean? Walter?"

"Walter, no!" said Dick, with the feeling that he had committed some blunder strong upon him. "Walter, no! I mean me!"

"You?" said the girl, with a bewildered look. "You?"

"Yes, me! Your cousin Percy, you know!"

The young girl's astonishment visibly increased, and she stared at Dick with the greatest possible amazement.

"Oh! lor," said Dick, mentally, "I'll be hanged if I haven't made a mistake and spoilt the whole affair. How uncommonly awkward! What in the world shall I do?"

While these thoughts swept through his mind, the young girl recovered herself.

She clapped her hands together, and she burst into a merry laugh.

Dick's perplexity increased, but in spite of himself a smile stole over his face.

The girl hit him playfully upon the cheek.

"Oh! Percy," she said, "that is like you, indeed. You were always fond of playing jokes, and I see you have not altered in the least. If anything, you have got worse. The idea, now, of your thinking of trying to persuade me you were my cousin! Whatever's put such an idea into your head?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Dick, who, with great presence of mind availed himself of this loophole of escape. "Strange things do come into your head sometimes."

"So they do, Percy."

But although Dick had so narrowly escaped discovery this time, yet he was more at a loss than before to know what he was taken to be. Another mistake on the subject would be fatal.

He hastened to turn the conversation.

"You don't ask me how it is I am so much behind my time."

"Nor more I did! How neglectful of you! Oh! and the night before last during the storm we were in such a

fright, and when we found you didn't come to time we were dreadfully alarmed. If you had not come as you have, father would have sent Thompson this morning to Southampton to know whether the *Ranedeer* had arrived."

When he heard this speech, Dick was in such a state of mental distress that, without exaggeration, he might literally have been knocked down with a feather, as the saying is.

It conveyed so much intelligence, and that of such a very startling character.

In the first place, it was clear the young girl had taken him for her brother, who had been in India during the past seven years.

That she should fall into such a mistake was nothing but natural.

Dick's costume was, as we have more than once stated, a half-military one, in addition to which he had all the comportment of a soldier in his attitude and bearing.

Some resemblance, too, might exist between the highwayman and the anxiously-expected brother.

The fact of his coming along the lane had not a little to do with it, for it was rarely travelled by any save visitors to the mansion.

Dick's heart smote him for the deception he had practised as soon as he knew it was her brother who was expected by the *Ranedeer*. Too well he knew the cause of his delay. The ship he had seen go to pieces, and the wreckers had dispatched the gallant soldier without a doubt.

The strong feeling of indignation that arose in his mind was, however, somewhat appeased by the reflection that their misdeeds had not gone altogether unpunished.

"Come, Percy," said the young girl again, "how dreadfully gloomy you are! What has happened? Is anything amiss?"

"No, no—nothing. But I have been set upon by robbers, who have wounded but not plundered me."

Dick pointed to his left arm as he spoke.

The girl gave a little scream of terror, as she said—

"How thoughtless of me, to be sure! No wonder you are different if you are in pain. And I actually to keep you standing here in the lane! Come in, come in at once."

So saying, she took hold of Dick's arm, and led him towards the lodge-gates.

Dick had now gone so far that he did not know how to retract; but the thought of the grief of the girl and her parents when they learned the cheat he had played upon them fairly made them tremble.

"You are badly hurt, I am sure. I can feel you trembling like a leaf. Oh! do make haste—do make haste."

For the last minute or two, Dick had felt his arm burn and ache dreadfully, and unquestionably if it did not receive immediate care it would turn out an ugly affair for him.

This, and the wish to elude the dragons, made Dick hesitate to speak those words which he felt sure would fill her with affliction, and he determined to postpone doing so as long as possible.

According to her wont, Bess followed her master with the greatest docility to the lodge-gate, one half of which was open.

At the door of the lodge itself Dick saw an old man. His bald pate glistened in the sunlight as, with a pleased smile upon his face, he bent low in respectful obeisance.

"He has fallen into the same mistake as the girl has," muttered Dick. "Never mind; so much the better."

"I be very glad to see you Master Percy," said the old man at the lodge. "Very glad indeed. We got sadly frightened about you."

"I daresay you did," said Turpin, with as careless an air as he could assume. "But never mind all that now. Here I am, you see, safe and sound with the exception of a scratch I got from some rascals who attacked me."

"Oh, master Percy," said the old domestic, in tones of genuine alarm, "are you indeed hurt?"

"Only a little. It will be nothing if it is attended to." "I will run off at once for Doctor Congreve. Make haste up to the hall with him, Miss Annie. I sha'n't be long gone."

So saying, the old man donned his hat and set off with

greater alacrity than could have been expected from one of his years.

"Blasts," muttered Turpin. "Not only for the haste with which you have set off to fetch the surgeon, but for telling me the name of my companion here."

"Come, Percy," said Annie, as we may as well at once call her, since such was her name, "we have already wasted too much time. Think how anxious father and mother are, for of course as yet they know nothing of your arrival."

"Of course not, Annie, as you say," said Turpin. "Take hold of my arm again, and we will soon set their hearts at rest."

"Oh yes. But do you know, Percy, I don't feel half so glad as I did a little while ago. You will laugh at me, I am sure, but I feel a presentiment of coming misfortune, though what shape it is going to take I know not. My heart is so heavy, Percy."

A gasping kind of sob came from her lips, and she leaned with increasing heaviness upon her supposititious brother's arm.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

TOM KING MAKES A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO GET FREE FROM THE DRAGONS.

THE certainty that the worst forebodings of the fair Annie would be confirmed pressed heavily upon Turpin's heart when he reflected that it was almost certain every one on board the ill-fated ship *Ranedeer*, with the exception of the child, had perished.

In silence then the strangely-assorted couple made their way along the well-kept carriage-drive. Neither had sufficient command over their emotions to speak a word.

But, nevertheless, Turpin could not help looking about him with the greatest delight. Never before had he seen a place one-half so beautiful, and when he emerged on to a spacious lawn and saw, about a hundred yards off, a fine stone mansion his pleasure almost vented itself in words of admiration, but he had sufficient self-control not to betray the fact that it was the first time he had seen the house.

Long before they could reach the front door it was thrown open, and a venerable couple descended the stone steps leading from it to the lawn.

They then, as well as their aged limbs would permit them, hurried across it towards Annie and Dick.

"Surely, thought the latter, there must be some strong likeness existing between myself and this lost son of theirs, or they would not all fall into the same mistake."

But the fact of his identity did not for a moment enter their minds.

The welcome he received at the hands of the old couple was of the warmest description, and they both were guilty of some very extraordinary manifestations of delight.

But they were interrupted by the gentle voice of Annie. "Father—mother!" she said, "you do not notice poor Percy is wounded."

"Wounded?" they iterated, with a sudden sensation of dread.

"Oh! believe me," said Dick, "it is nothing. Besides—besides—"

Turpin wanted to say the old man at the gate had gone for a surgeon, but he could not think of his name.

Suddenly, however, he remembered that something had been said about Thompson going to Southampton to see if the *Ranedeer* had arrived, and he jumped to the conclusion that it was that individual he saw at the gate; so he added, hastily—

"Besides, Thompson has gone to fetch Doctor Congreve."

"Thompson!" exclaimed Annie, in a manner that made Dick instantly cognizant he had made another blunder. "Thompson! why that was not Thompson we saw at the gate."

"Oh, wasn't it?" said Dick, scarcely able to conceal his confusion. "I thought it was; but when you come to lose much blood it generally has a bewildering effect."

To be sure it does, my boy," said the old man, kindly. "Let me assist you to the house. I hope, as you say, the wound is not a dangerous one; but I know you often speak lightly of a serious wound."

The old man took hold of Dick by the arm, while Annie held the other; so between them he got on pretty well.

And, to tell the truth, the wound was more painful, and

he was more feeble than he cared to admit even to himself, which made their assistance very acceptable.

And thus, after a series of extraordinary events, did Dick Turpin, the highwayman, find himself the recipient of more genuine kindness than he had ever received before.

If Dick's heart was rough and was a very tender one, and the attention he was so unworthily having at their hands almost overcame him.

He could not help making with some bitterness the reflection that, under his true character, there was not one person who would succour him, and those very people by whom he was surrounded would have turned from him in loathing and contempt could they but have been made aware of who he was, and the cruel imposition he had practised upon them.

As for Dick's behaviour on this occasion, we cannot sufficiently condemn its disingenuousness, though, to be sure, there was every allowance to be made for him.

In the first place there was his wound.

This not only disabled him, but clouded his perceptions of what was exactly right and wrong.

Then there was the immediate danger in which he stood of being captured by the dragoons.

So, after all, some excuse is to be made for his conduct.

But that he would be long able to maintain the deception he had so successfully commenced, was a matter that admitted of the gravest doubt.

That the real brother would turn up there was, unfortunately, but little prospect. We say unfortunately, because we allude to the worthy family at the Hall, and not to Turpin.

To him such an occurrence would be fortunate.

With many cautions as to his footing, Dick was assisted up to the stone steps in front of the mansion.

Black Bess, who had followed him so far, much after the fashion of a dog, gave now the most unequivocal symptoms of mounting the steps after him.

"Why, God bless my life," said the squire, for such was the title by which the father of the fair Annie was designated, "what an extraordinary horse you have got. Why he is actually following you up the steps."

Dick smiled faintly as he said—

"I am much attached to the creature, and I believe she is to me. Let some one take her to the stables and look after her."

"It shall be done. It is a splendid animal, surely. Here, William—William, look after Percy's horse."

In answer to this call a neatly-dressed groom made his appearance from that portion of the hall devoted to the use of the servants, and taking Black Bess by the bridle led her off towards the stables.

On entering the hall Dick was ushered into a well but plainly-furnished room.

Between them the highwayman was gently forced into a seat.

The beautiful repose that pervaded this room had a languid effect upon Dick, and as he leaned back in the arm chair his eyes half closed.

At this moment there came the sound of wheels grating upon the fine gravel of which the carriage-drive was composed.

It was Doctor Congreve.

Entering hastily, and with the privileged freedom of a medical man, he walked straight up to Dick, and looked him warmly by the hand.

"Glad to see you, Percy, my boy, after so long an absence, very glad. Sorry you have met with a hurt. Soon put that all right, though."

As he spoke he quickly but skillfully removed the bandage which Dick had tied on, and then, with a pair of small-sized scissors, completely cut away the sleeve of his coat.

With a few words, which elicited from the old doctor the warmest eulogiums, Annie had left the room, and now returned, carrying a basin of warm water, with a piece of sponge in it, and two or three linen cloths.

Of these the doctor made immediate use.

Before the congealed blood was washed away, Dick's wound certainly did have a ghastly and terrifying appearance, but the performance of that operation made a world of difference.

"Thank goodness," said the doctor, examining the wound, "there are no bones broken or veins severed; I

will bind it up for you, and then all that you will require will be a day or two's rest. I think I can safely say that at present there are no alarming symptoms."

To no one there present was this assurance more welcome than it was to Dick himself.

"Scarcely, however, had the doctor finished tying his bandage than the old man who had stood at the gate came running, breathless with excitement, into the room.

"Squire Edleton—sir!" he gasped, "there's a troop of mounted dragoons at the gate!"

This intelligence caused Dick to bound to his feet.

"Dragoons?" said the squire, "what do they want here?"

"They have a warrant to search all places they think proper."

"Yes—yes!"

"For DICK TURPIN, the highwayman!"

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

FOLLOWS THE FORTUNES OF TOM KING.

We feel it to be a duty incumbent upon us to relate to the reader, without further delay, how Tom King fared at the hands of the dragoons.

It will be remembered that when we saw him last, he, as well as the soldiers with him, had just witnessed Bess take the terrific leap over the hedge.

His heart, which before was heavily oppressed, now grew light, for his companion had every chance of ultimate escape, and he felt assured that he would leave no stone unturned to effect his rescue.

Such being his convictions, he very complacently suffered himself to be led along by his captors.

Still, the anticipation of being rescued by his friend did not prevent him from keeping a sharp look out to be ready to seize upon any chance accident which might be favourable to his freeing himself.

There was, as the reader has not failed to perceive, a certain independency of disposition about Tom King, which would make him much prefer owing his freedom to his own individual exertions than to those of another person, how great soever a friend he might be.

But surrounded by so many armed men as he was, the hopes of his being able to effect his own release were few indeed.

His hands were tightly tied in front of him.

The troopers on his left hand had hold of his horse's bridle.

And just as the little cavalcade put itself in motion, the officer in command cried out in a loud voice—

"Guard your prisoner well, my boys. If he makes the least attempt to escape bring him down with your guns, without waiting for me to give you the word to fire. We will lodge him in Newgate in less than twenty-four hours, alive or dead!"

There was something so vindictive and cold-blooded about this speech that Tom fairly shuddered as he heard it.

The horses were to some extent knocked up by the long chase they had had after Dick, so that their rate of progression for the next few miles was rather slow.

As they were so close to Southampton they determined to push on there and get a fresh supply of horses, when they would be able to reach London easily enough.

The warrant for the apprehension of the two highwaymen, a true copy of which had been given to the commanding officer of each troop of dragoons, although giving them ample authority to lodge Turpin and King in any of his majesty's prisons, yet expressly stipulated they should be taken as soon as possible to Newgate.

In pursuance of this Tom King, when Southampton was reached, which was a few minutes before eight, was put in the prison there, while the dragoons proceeded to the town authorities to give a report of their proceedings, and also to receive a fresh relay of horses.

Altogether not an hour was spent in the town, which then was far from being the important place it is now, and during that hour Tom was so closely and constantly watched that he had not the slightest opportunity afforded him of achieving his desires.

The intelligence of the captivity of the notorious highwayman, whose deeds had produced throughout England what is now termed a "sensational," spread with great

rapidly through the town, and when Tom King was led out of prison and mounted, a dense crowd had collected.

Tom's pale and thoughtful face, as well as his youthfulness and aristocratic bearing, elicited a feeling of commiseration from the mob, who, while looking at him forgot the deeds of violence of which he had been guilty.

Indeed, so far did this feeling extend that the dragoons began to entertain serious fears that a rescue would be attempted.

And, indeed, had there been some one to direct them, or had anything occurred to turn their thoughts in that direction, there would have been serious grounds for entertaining such a fear.

As it was, however, the crowd contented themselves with the exhibition simply of their good feeling towards the prisoner.

Tom King was too acute an observer of human nature not to be well aware that a mob is about the least dependable thing in the world.

Therefore, he did not seek to incite them to do aught on his account.

As the little troop, with their prisoner, passed at a trot through the bar they shouted and huzzed with that vehemency characteristic of English mobs.

It was by no means a pleasant journey which Tom King had in prospective, yet he would not suffer his spirit to be cast down, though he did not affect an exuberancy of feeling which he did not possess.

On the contrary, he occupied his mind with but one thought, and that was, how should he escape?

He could find no satisfactory answer to the question.

Midday came before they came to another halt, and then it was more in consideration of the cattle than the soldiers or their prisoner.

It was at a very retired road-side public-house at which they stopped.

The clatter of the horses' feet upon the road-way had the effect of bringing the landlord and all his domestics to the front door, and they looked at the approaching troop with the greatest curiosity and interest.

Probably such a sight had not greeted their eyes for many a year.

In a gruff voice, the officer called out to the landlord to prepare a meal for his men without delay, and also groom and feed their horses.

The landlord, who had never before had so many visitors at once at the "Crown and Cushion," was in so great a frustration that he hardly knew which way to turn.

Then, for the first time, he noticed that they had a prisoner amongst them.

The military appearance of Tom's costume made him think it was a deserter they had captured.

At any rate, it was easy to see that Tom had the sympathy of the landlord and the landlady as well.

So closely hemmed in as he was by foes, and with so many keen eyes fixed upon him, he made their sympathy of not the least avail.

But Tom King did not despair. Although a considerable portion of the distance which intervened between London and Southampton had been passed over without his having done anything, yet he had the sanguine hope that something would happen to his advantage before he actually reached the metropolis.

In this, however, he was doomed to be most bitterly disappointed. The meal at the "Crown and Cushion" was finished, the horses were led out, they again mounted, and Tom was further from his object than ever.

The night set in dismal and dark, but this circumstance, far from favouring Tom, only caused the soldiers to take additional precautions. A long rope was provided with a noose at one end of it, which was passed over Tom's head and shoulders, and then drawn tight, while one of the soldiers held the end of it in his hand, and to make still more secure, he twisted it many times round his arm.

The soldiers had evidently determined to keep him safely until they reached a prison, when the onus of keeping him in security would devolve upon some one else.

King ground his teeth with rage, but seeing how impossible it was to hold any longer to the hope of making his escape, he resigned himself sullenly to his fate.

He felt now that his life and liberty depended solely upon the exertions of his comrade, Dick Turpin, and might not be find it as impossible to aid him as it had been for him to attempt his own escape?

Surely yes, and even then he was by no means certain that he had escaped his foes. There was an extreme probability that he was at that very moment in a predicament closely resembling his.

They halted not all night, and just as a faint light in the east showed that another day was coming, they trotted up Whitehall to the Horse-guards, where they dismounted.

The remainder of the distance to Newgate they passed on foot.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE DRAGOONS GIVE TOM KING INTO THE CUSTODY OF THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE.

JUST as the sun had risen to a sufficient height to gild with his first beams the cross upon the summit of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, a procession, which arrested the immediate attention of all who were abroad at that early hour, came down Fleet-street, and, crossing Fleet-market, ascended Ludgate-hill.

This procession consisted of the twenty dragoons who had taken Tom King prisoner, which individual walked in their midst, looking by no means cheerful under the circumstances.

As at the present time, so at the period of our tale, it was an impossibility for anything at all out of the common way to pass along the street without its attracting a large number of people.

On the present occasion they thronged before, they thronged behind, they thronged all round—pushing, shouting, swearing, laughing.

Every moment, too, added to their number, so that by the time the procession reached the corner of the Old Bailey, the street was almost blocked up with people, and the dragoons were put to some trouble to force a passage.

In a very short time, however, the gate leading into one of the lobbies where prisoners were received, was reached.

The soldiers ranked themselves on either side of it, after the fashion of a guard of honour.

Then the officer himself seized the ponderous knocker, and banged away at the door at a furious rate, which would, he judged, have the effect of informing the authorities within that a prisoner of unusual distinction was brought to the gates.

It would seem, by the way the man who opened the little wicket in the door rubbed his eyes and yawned, that he had only just been aroused from a comfortable sleep.

This man, too, was evidently about to make some passionate remark, but when he saw the stern countenance of the commanding officer, he, with great suddenness, altered his mind.

"Open the door, and send for the governor at once, fellow, and don't stand there like that, or I'll have you dismissed for neglect of duty!"

"Cuss you!" said the turnkey, for such he was.

"Eh?"

"I said, noble sir," replied the man, in a fawning tone, "I hoped you would not be too hard upon a poor fellow. You see, what with one thing and what with another—" "There, there. Never mind all that, but open the door."

"Yes, sir. The door is open, if you please. Walk in!"

This man, who was one of the most ruffianly bullies in all Newgate, was submission himself to this officer who had bullied him first.

It may be safely taken as a rule that all bullies are cowards, and the easiest way to manage them is to put on and maintain a more blustering air than they themselves assume.

It cowers them at once.

This janitor then flung open the door to its full extent, to allow the troop to enter.

Now it so happened that the governor and ordinary of the prison had been very early that morning engaged in a little private business on their own account, and as the soldiers entered the yard at one door, these worthies entered it at another.

"Mr. Tapner! Mr. Tapner!" said the man who had charge of the gate, "here is a prisoner, escorted by a troop of dragoons!"



[DICK TURPIN DISGUISED AS A FARMER VISITS TOM KING IN HIS CELL.]

"What prisoner, stupid!" growled Mr. Tapner, who was not possessed of the mildest of natures.

"I don't know, Mr. Tapner; leastways for certain it's either Dick Turpin or Tom King."

"Ha!" said Tapner, the governor, looking interested. Then, stepping forward, he said, to the officer:

"Which of these notorious depredators have you brought us, sir?"

"Tom King, I believe. Take charge of him at once, and let me have your receipt. I don't want him any longer on my hands."

"No, sir, of course not," said Mr. Tapner, rubbing one hand over the other in a disagreeable fashion peculiar to him, while a hideous grin distorted his countenance. "Yea," said the ordinary, whose name was Colley, "he is an ungodly fleshpot, and the devil strong within him."

Having uttered this speech, Mr. Colley—we beg his pardon, we should have said the Reverend Mr. Colley—uttered a groan, drew down the corners of his mouth, and turned the whites of his eyes piously upward.

While this was going forward Tom had been brought safely into the yard, and the great gate closed behind him. As he heard it shut with a clanging sound a shudder crept over him, despite the effort which he made to subdue it, and at the same moment he involuntarily found himself wondering whether he should ever again pass out in freedom.

His face had a very dejected look, for his mind was filled with a presentiment of coming evil.

But the black and frowning walls of Newgate are sufficient to appal the stoutest breast.

The governor left the yard for a moment or two, and when he returned he carried in his hand a slip of paper, which he handed to the officer.

It was a receipt for the body of the highwayman, and for whose safe keeping he was thenceforth responsible.

"Thank the fates, that job's over," said the officer, in tones that admitted no doubts of their sincerity. "It goes against the grain, I can tell you, to have to do the work of police-officers."

Mr. Tapner grinned and rubbed his hands, but otherwise made no reply to this speech.

The intelligence that Tom King had been captured very quickly spread among the prison officials, and there was soon a goodly collection of turnkeys and other people employed in Newgate.

No sooner did the officer receive the paper from the governor than he hastily consigned it to his pocket, and then, seeing that two turnkeys had taken Tom in hand, he gave his men the order to form into rank, and as soon as this was done the gates were opened to allow them egress, and off they went.

The governor and ordinary watched the soldiers march down the street.

Then turning back, the former walked up to where King was standing, and said in his coarsest tones—
"Well, villain!"

He evidently had indulged in the hope that Tom would utter some angry remonstrance, but he was disappointed. The prisoner said nothing—in fact, he took not the slightest notice whatever.

Now this aggravated Mr. Tapner exceedingly. He wanted to have some opportunity of venting his natural spite upon him, but of course while Tom choose to be indifferent, he could not.

But he made one more attempt.

"What do you mean, you unbung villain?" he asked, thrusting his face close to Tom's. "Where's your manners?"

"There," said Tom, who was greatly incensed; "there, and I hope you like it!"

As he spoke, Tom lifted up his feet, and, with the very heavy riding boots which he wore, gave the malignant governor two or three such terrific kicks upon the shins that he (the governor) fairly danced about with pain, while he bellowed like a bull.

The turnkeys who had hold of Tom drew back a little at this exhibition of spirit which, from the previous demeanour of the prisoner, they did not expect.

They had, too, to screw up their faces dreadfully, in order to control the impulse which they felt to indulge in a hearty laugh.

"In a general way," said Tom, "I'm not much given to kicking, but when a chap's hands are tied and his feet ain't, what else is he to do?"

"Curse you!" said Mr. Tapner, recovering so far as to be able to stoop and rub his shins. "You shall pay dearly for this. I'll make you repent it!"

"It's your own doings," replied Tom. "If you had been content with simply doing your duty, you would have escaped it."

"Young man," said the chaplain, with a hypocritical whine, "young man, the evil one is strong within thee, and yet the Lord willing I will cast him out."

"Am I to understand," said Tom, "that you uphold him in insulting defenceless prisoners? and he has insulted me."

"Oh! young man—young man. Banish, I beseech you, the evil spirit from your heart, and repentant enter the paths of grace."

"Dixon!" roared the governor. "Dixon!"

"Yes, Mr. Tapner, I am here, sir, at your commands." A brutal and repulsive-looking man pushed his way forward.

"Get ready the heaviest irons in the jail, and rivet them on that scoundrel youder. Clarke!" he added, turning to one of the men who held King by the collar. "Off with him to No. 26."

"No. 26?"

"Yes; do you want to palter with me? I said No. 26."

"But—"

"I will have no buts nor barrels in the case!"

Now this, it should be said, was one of the governor's standing jokes; so all his subordinates laughed, as some one has it, "consumedly."

But only for a moment did the rascal, governor give way to his mirth. The pain in his shins was rather too acute.

"Come along," said the man who had been called Clarke. "Take my advice and don't make a rumpus. It will be all the better for you."

"Away with him," said Mr. Tapner. "And mind you make all secure. I shall visit the cell in an hour to see if my instructions are properly carried out."

With this the turnkeys hurried Tom King down a passage, who, however, resisted not in the least. In fact, the feeling of apathy from which the governor's insolence had aroused him was quickly returning.

"You should not be quite so violent, my dear friend," said the chaplain to the governor, to which piece of advice Mr. Tapner responded by telling the reverend gentleman to betake himself to a place which in these refined days is never mentioned to ears polite. Certainly it was not to heaven that he consigned him.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

TOM KING FINDS NEWGATE A MOST UNCOMFORTABLE ABIDING-PLACE.

The cell in Newgate which was known as No. 26 was, without exception, the dirtiest, dampest, darkest, and worst-ventilated one in all the building, and very rarely indeed was it made use of for any but refractory prisoners.

To well-balanced minds it seems an impossibility for anyone to behave towards a helpless prisoner in the way that Mr. Tapner did, but, for the discredit of humanity, there are many men who would have acted as badly, or even worse.

We do not mean to imply that the governors of all prisons are ruffians, because—and especially at the present day—such is not the case, but we do say that Mr. Tapner was a ruffian, and that he was governor of a prison.

The reader will have the pleasure or the pain—which ever of the two it may happen to be—of hearing a great deal more about the governor and his friend the Rev. Mr. Colley, but it will be nothing to their credit.

In fact, we are not afraid to go the length of saying that scarcely ever have existed two such infernal villains as they were, and as succeeding events will prove them to be.

Tom King grew fairly weary before he reached the door of the cell in which he was to be placed, so many passages did they have to traverse and flights of steps to descend.

At last one of the turnkeys, who walked in advance carrying a light, came to a stand and said—

"Here you are!"

Then followed the grating of rusty bolts, as they were withdrawn from their rusty sockets, and the rattle of a key in the lock.

Then the door swung open.

The man with the light entered first.

Then Clarke and Tom King followed.

Dixon, who was the smith, and whose duty it was to rivet and unrivet the prisoners' fetters, brought up the rear.

A minute or two's delay then took place in consequence of the non-arrival of the man with the fetters.

Tom King, with an air of utter weariness, seated himself upon the stone settle, which was all there was to serve him for bed, chair, and table.

He roused himself a little upon hearing a heavy footstep in the passage outside, and then a man, carrying a mass of iron upon his back, entered.

With professional dexterity the smith secured the fetters to Tom King.

"Now then, you'll do!" he said. "You wont get out of that, I take it."

"Oh! he's sulky, Dixon," said one of the others, observing that Tom King made no reply. "Come away, and let him alone, he will be glad enough to have some one say a word to him when he's been here a little while. Come on. It's time we were off."

"All right. Good bye, old boy. We shall find you here when we want you."

And with a laugh at, as he conceived his own wit, the smith took up his bag of tools, and, along with the turnkeys, left the dungeon.

The hideous noise which was made in fastening the door jarred sadly upon Tom's nerves.

He was in darkness.

At least he thought so for some minutes, and then he became aware that a very faint kind of twilight was diffused around him.

By its aid, as he grew accustomed to it, he could see the dimensions of his dungeon.

It was between six and eight feet square.

The walls were smooth, and all but black.

The door appeared to be cased with iron.

It was listlessness and mere want of occupation that made Tom notice these things. In fact, he was scarcely conscious that he had done so.

When the door had been fastened, and the echo of the men's footsteps had died away, Tom found himself in the deepest silence.

He threw himself at full length upon the seat and gave himself up to thought.

It was, we fancy, want of proper food and rest that had reduced Tom to such a state of prostration, although chagrin at the precautions taken by the officers, and which had prevented his making even an attempt to escape, had undoubtedly a great deal to do with it.

As he laid there and thought, he naturally reverted to his comrade, and wondered whether he had been successful in escaping, and if he had, what chances he had of assisting him.

Of course Tom had not the advantage which the reader has, since he knew nothing of Dick's very ticklish position at the residence of Squire Edilton.

The last he saw of him was when Bess leaped over the hedgerow into the meadow.

Tom's ruminations ended by his falling into an uneasy slumber. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by feeling a heavy hand on his arm, and when he opened his eyes he was obliged to close them again because of the light which filled the place.

The disagreeable tones of the governor's voice were the first sounds that fell upon Tom's ear.

But he no longer spoke in the way he did.

"Yes, Mr. Blandy, as you say, sir, it is a gloomy sort of place; but it's safe, sir, and so I thought I had better put him in, so as to make sure, you see, sir. I have accommodated him with a little jewellery as well."

Tom opened his eyes again, while Mr. Tapner was making this very facetious speech, and he saw him, with a smile upon his lips, rub his greasy hands one over the other.

At first our old friend was rather surprised to account for this visit, and at a loss to know who Mr. Blandy was, but in another minute he remembered he was one of the sheriffs.

Now this gentleman was about as different to the Governor of Newgate as any two human beings well could be, so of course they did not agree at all.

Mr. Blandy had a tolerably correct idea of what Mr. Governor really was, and so, being a retired city tradesman and having nothing to do, he occupied his time in paying frequent visits to the prison, and correcting any of Mr. Tapner's abuses.

This was a very laudable plan of his, though it made the governor and the ordinary bitter enemies. But Mr. Blandy did not care for that, and took no pains to conceal his contempt for his malignity.

Of course the governor was polite enough not to come to any open rupture with the sheriff, but hugged the hope that when his year of office had expired he would be troubled with him no longer.

Hence it was that he spoke in the deferential, guathonical way he did.

To tell the truth, although he did not show it, he was very ill at ease about this visit, and if there had been time he most unquestionably would have had Tom removed to some other cell, for he exceeded his duty in putting him in the horrible place he did.

But Mr. Blandy had heard that Tom King had been lodged in Newgate; so he made all speed there, and insisted upon being taken to his cell at once.

The governor felt that to hesitate in any way would be to imply that he was aware he had acted wrongly, so he determined to put a good face on the matter.

The sheriff had expressed his surprise at his having consigned Tom to No. 26 before he had been even taken before a magistrate, and hence the words which Tom King had heard uttered when the governor and the sheriff entered his cell.

It did not need a second glance to show that Mr. Blandy had that rare possession—a feeling heart, and Tom felt sure he had found a friend, and one who not only had the will but also the power to be of service to him and a check upon the ill usage of the governor.

On the other hand, Tom's youth, personal appearance,

and inoffensive, gentlemanly demeanour made a deep impression upon the sheriff, who became prepossessed in his favour instantly.

Poor Tom. His was no enviable lot, doomed to be the bone of contention between two of the civic authorities. He was like the man in the fable who had two wives, one old like himself and one young. The former liked to see his gray hairs and pulled out the black ones; the latter was of a contrary opinion, so ere long the poor man found himself without a hair at all.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE 1 RAGOOONS, BUT IS SAVED BY THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER, FAIR ANNIE.

MR. BLANDY turned round, and looked the governor sternly in the face.

"Mr. Tapner," he said, "I am sorry to have to say it in the presence of the prisoner and your subordinates, but nevertheless I shan't shrink from it on that account. The manner in which you have treated your prisoner is perfectly unjustifiable. Have him removed at once to another cell."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom King, rising and bowing as well as his heavy fetters would allow him. "I shall always be beholden to you, for no one is so susceptible of kindness as myself; I suppose, because I receive so little of it."

The sheriff was fairly taken aback when he heard this speech from the lips of a highwayman, and still more was he surprised at the gentlemanly air with which Tom spoke.

"You amaze me," he said. "Who are you?"

"What you see!" replied Tom, gloomily, for at that moment he reflected what he was.

"He—he!" laughed the governor. "Well done! Very well done, indeed."

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Blandy. "Give me your reason for treating this man, who in the eyes of the law is innocent, since he has not been convicted. I ask what is your reason for treating him with such rigour?"

"I—I told you, sir," stammered the governor. "He was violent, sir—very violent, so I had him put here for safety."

"He doesn't look much like a violent man. What did he do?"

"Assaulted me."

"Assaulted you! and he a prisoner. Impossible!"

"It is true for all that—he—"

"But what was his motive—what provoked him?"

"N—nothing!" stammered the governor, who discovered too late that it would have been best policy to have kept silent, and have said nothing in his extenuation.

"Will you excuse me?" said Tom King, interrupting the governor. "I should like you to be made acquainted with the facts of the case."

"Oh! certainly. Speak freely, my young friend."

"I have nothing to say," responded Tom King, "than that I was brought here strongly bound, and while incapable of lifting up my hand in my own defence, was grossly insulted by the governor here in the presence of his men."

"Indeed," said the sheriff, "is this so?"

"It is indeed, and can you wonder that I resented the insult in the only way that was left for me?"

"Certainly not. Mr. Tapner, I shall report this to the Secretary of State. It is not the first of these kind of offences that I have been made cognizant of. Call your man, and have these fetters taken off. He must then proceed at once to Bow Street, in order that the magistrate may duly commit him for trial."

"Very well, Mr. Blandy," said the governor, in a humble tone, "I am sorry I have displeased you, but all I sought was to make the prisoner quite secure. If you think I have overstepped my duty I cannot help it. Everybody, however, will do me the justice to say it was a mistake on the right side."

"That depends upon what you call the right side."

"Of his behaviour to me," said the governor, assuming a magnanimous air, "I shall say nothing."

"Very well, very well," said Mr. Blandy; "come along. It strikes me, after all, it is a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other."

Dixon, the smith, then came forward, and very soon freed Tom from the irons.

Short as was the time he had worn them, yet it was sufficiently long for them to cramp his limbs, and he stretched himself with a sensation of great relief.

A pair of handcuffs were placed upon his wrists, and then, escorted by the turnkeys, the governor, and Mr. Blandy, he was led out into the lobby of Newgate.

The man at the door opened it to allow them to pass out.

A hackney-coach, which happened to be passing, was called, and the sheriff, Tom King, and two officers, entered.

The governor they left standing on the threshold of the prison muttering inaudible curses on the head of Mr. Blandy.

It took the crazy vehicle a good quarter-of-an-hour to reach Bow-street, and when they drew up at the door of the court the day's business had already commenced.

Had Tom been an ordinary offender he would have had to have waited until the last, but as he was an extraordinary one, he was allowed the precedence.

The examination before the magistrates was more a matter of form than anything else, still it had to be gone through.

The justice on the occasion was one whose name was well known then, and is even at the present day.

It was Justice Fielding.

The daring depredations in which Tom had been mixed up had reached his ears, and after hearing a short statement of the capture from the officer of dragoons who was in attendance, he made out a warrant committing him to the sessions.

These would come off in exactly ten days from that time, so that Tom had at least an opportunity of doing something in his own behalf.

On the subject of the fetters and the dark cell at No. 26, not a word was said until the sheriff spoke to the officers as they were about to drive back to Newgate.

"Tell Mr. Tapner," he said, "that I shall look in again in the course of the day."

"Very well, Mr. Blandy. All right, sir."

The coach was driven off again to Newgate.

"And verily much obliged Mr. Tapner will be to you for your trouble," added the officer, as soon as they were out of the sheriff's hearing,—"verily much obliged to you indeed."

As the hackney-coach turned the corner of Bow-street into Long-acre a hope of escape sprang up in Tom's mind.

He was in a coach, and had two men only to contend against.

Yet, in that circumscribed space one man, let his courage and resolution be what they might, would be scarcely a match for two, and so after a minute or two's consideration, Tom thought himself, especially when he reflected, that a cry from one of his foes would bring scores of people to their assistance.

It was evident if anything was done in the way of escape it would be by stratagem, not force.

These thoughts quickly passed through Tom's mind, and before the coach got half-a-dozen yards further he had made up his mind what he was going to do.

The officers were sitting on the back seat with Tom between them.

King noticed that the one on his left hand had a rather more prepossessing physiognomy than the other, and therefore to him Tom addressed himself.

"I say, my friend," he said, "just listen to me."

"Well, what's the row now?"

"I suppose it's pretty certain what my fate will be at the Old Bailey next week?"

"Rather, I should say. Should you, Jacks?"

The officer who had been called Jacks gave a grunt by way of assent.

"Now, look here, my friends, you will excuse my calling you such?"

"Oh! stow your gammon."

"If you only feel inclined, I can make it well worth your while to look out at one side of the carriage while I get out at the other."

Both the officers shook their heads.

"No, no," they said, "it won't do. Oh! no, not at all!"

"But I tell you it will. You won't get the reward if you do take me back, but on the contrary, if you let me go, you shall have a hundred pounds a piece."

The offer of this sum of money staggered the officers a little, and they hesitated.

Tom saw his advantage and hastened to follow it up.

"Take my advice and my offer. You must not hesitate much longer, or we shall get to Newgate, and then it will be too late."

"Well, then," said the officer named Jacks, "just hand us over the blunt."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

TOM GETS UP AN ELABORATE PLAN OF ESCAPE, AND MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

"AREN'T!"

"Oh?"

"Well, you see, dear Mr. Jacks——"

"Oh, stow that. Hand over the blunt."

"I would with all the pleasure in life, only you see there's a little obstacle in the way."

"Ha, ha!" said Jacks.

"He, he!" echoed his companion.

"Known how the case stood, didn't you?"

"In course."

Whereupon the two officers indulged in some more laughter.

"You're a bit too fast," said Tom. "Why don't you wait and hear what the obstacle is, when you know how precious time is."

"Oh! we knowed what the obstacle was afore you spoke."

"Oh! did you? Come now, what was it?"

"You ain't got the money."

"Not about me, I haven't."

"Well, what did I tell you?"

"But——"

"Oh! hold your row."

"Very well. It will be as good a thing for you as for me. I haven't got the money, as you say, but if you like you can order the man to drive where it is."

"Do you mean what you say?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, then, where is the money?"

"I'll tell you as soon as I have your consent. Do you agree?"

"Yes, provided it ain't far off."

"It isn't. You can understand, I daresay, without much trouble, that one way or another a good bit of money must come into my hands."

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, I don't spend it all, and in various places I have hidden, in small portions, a very large sum of money. Now, not very far from here, I can take you to a place where you will find exactly the amount named."

"Two hundred pounds?"

"Just so."

"Go on then."

"But you must take your oath beforehand to keep your word with me."

"Oh! we take the oath, that's understood."

"Then tell the man to drive to Theobald's-road, the end nearest Red Lion-square."

"Theobald's-road?"

"Yes, the end nearest Red Lion-square."

"You ain't up to no gammon?"

"Certainly not."

"We'll try you then. And I tell you for your own good, you had best not play us false."

"Nor you me," said Tom.

Mr. Jacks, who happened to be behind Tom, winked his eye at his comrade, who at once understood what was meant.

This was simply to take the money from Tom and then, so far from letting him free, keep him a prisoner.

But in this instance they were destined to overreach themselves in their cunning treachery, for Tom had no intention of giving them money at all, nor had, as the reader is aware, any money hidden anywhere.

The truth was, Tom was in such a desperate position that he could not by any means make things worse than they were, while there was just the bare prospect of making them better.

But it was a bare prospect.

The coachman, however, agreeable to the instructions of the officers, directed his vehicle to Theobald's-road.

Now Tom had fixed upon this place as being about the nearest solitary spot there was; for at the period of our story there were but few buildings in that direction.

The officers tried to get out of Tom whereabouts the treasure was, but he turned a deaf ear to the subject.

In a little while, however, the coach stopped.

Mr. Jacks alighted first.

Then he assisted out his prisoner, who was closely followed by the other officer.

"Tell the man to drive round the corner," said King. "I don't want him to know where it is."

There was nothing unreasonable in this, so the order was given at once.

"Now, Tom, no humbug," said Mr. Jacks, "Where is it?"

Tom assumed an air of great secrecy and mystery.

His wrists were still confined by the handcuffs, but he did not think it would be over-wise to ask to have them taken off just at present.

On reaching a grating that was over a drain he stooped and tried to lift it from its position.

The officers looked at him with surprise, but Tom seemed so in earnest that their suspicions were allayed.

The iron grating or trap resisted, however, Tom's utmost efforts to lift it, so he was obliged to give up the attempt.

"You don't mean to tell us you have hidden your treasure in the sewer, do you?"

"I do."

"Nonsense!"

"It is all sense. A capital hiding-place, is it not?"

"I should never have thought of looking there."

"Nor any one else, that's the best of it. You must know that in the wall there is a brick out, and in the space is a little packet. That packet contains two hundred and fifty sovereigns."

"The devil it does! but you said two hundred just now."

"Oh! did I? Then that was a mistake."

"And so you mean to say if we lift the trap, that we shall find the money in a hole in the side of the wall?"

"Exactly."

"Very well. Now, Jacks."

"But stop," said Tom, "take off my handcuffs, and then I will get it up for you. I have tried, but I can't with them on."

Mr. Jacks put his finger by the side of his nose.

"Oh! wouldn't you like it?" he said. "No, no, we'll lift the trap, and not trouble you about it."

"Oh! thank you for nothing; but it strikes me you have all the advantage on your side. I have trusted you, and you ought to trust me."

"Ha! ha! Now then, up with it."

By their joint exertions, the two officers strove to raise the grating.

They had, of course, to bend down to their task.

This was the opportunity for which Tom was watching, only he hoped that when it occurred his hands would be at liberty.

This was not the case, but he did the best he could under the circumstances.

That was, with great rapidity to push the two officers over into the roadway, and then dart off at full speed.

The position the officers were compelled to assume in order to lift up the grating favoured the execution of this feat to an enormous extent, and there is no question that if Tom's hands had been unfettered he would have got away entirely, but as it was it made ultimate escape a very doubtful affair.

Nevertheless the officers measured their full length in the road.

But they were rather used to surprises, so they were upon their feet again, and yelling at the tops of their voices, before Tom was fairly round the corner.

"Stop him!" they cried. "An escape! Stop him! A highwayman! A highwayman!"

But our friend, now that he knew speed was all that was required of him, got over the ground with extraordinary fleetness.

His foes, though, were very close upon his track, and being as it was middle day he was almost certain to meet a great many people, though then it was a neighbourhood little frequented.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN PAYS A VISIT TO THE COSTUMIER'S IN BOW-STREET, COVENT-GARDEN.

The cries of the officers in a very few minutes attracted those who were at a distance.

No one can have walked much in London and not been surprised at the rapidity with which a dense crowd collects. A few minutes is all that is required.

The wonder is where they all come from so quickly.

On this occasion, therefore, the officers were not long in getting a crowd about them, which increased every moment.

Tom King had taken that direction of the open country, and had every hope, could he but reach the green lanes and meadows which then lay north of King's-cross, that he should be able to battle them completely.

The rage of Mr. Jacks and his brother officer can very easily be imagined. They had made sure of securing the money and retaining their prisoner all the same.

As it turned out, however, they got neither.

Tom certainly deserves a good deal of credit for evading them as he did. It is no easy thing to get up a plan on the spur of the moment.

Certainly the fiction about the money under the sewer grating was a good one.

He ran on unheeding his pursuers.

Ran as a man only can run when he is running for his life.

He made in his progress many a desperate tug at his handcuffs, but all to no purpose. He bruised his hands and rubbed the skin off, but he accomplished nothing more.

A very few attempts showed him the futility of trying to get free by such means, and so he turned the whole of his attention to running as quickly as his legs would carry him.

His pursuers kept up a terrible noise.

Tom turned his head over his shoulder and looked back. He had certainly gained very little upon them.

But some yards in advance of all the rest he could see the two officers.

They were almost frantic.

In the first place they were wrong to have listened to the offer that was made to them, and then consenting to turn out of the way was a serious dereliction of duty, and for which they would be liable to a heavy and severe punishment.

Their exertions were something terrific, and they incited on the crowd who followed them by the most extravagant offers of reward.

Still they could do no more than keep the highwayman in sight, and they had considerable difficulty in doing that.

On went Tom with the speed of a hunted hare.

But, alas! his efforts to escape were destined to be of no avail.

At a sharp trot round a bend in the lane he is pursuing comes a troop of dragoons.

Tom could not control a cry of despair.

Those in the rear uttered a triumphant shout.

Of course Tom pulled up. Every step he took now would only have the effect of bringing him nearer to his foes.

We stated in a former number that all the roads about London were patrolled by different bodies of dragoon guards.

This was one of them.

From the elevated position they occupied on the backs of their horses, they were able to see at a glance the true state of affairs.

Tom was at bay.

He glared panting and breathless about him.

There was no escape.

With the instinct of despair, he made a dash at the hedge, and strove to scramble through, but the effort was a vain one.

He found it too closely planted for a cat even to have squeezed through.

Then in another moment his foes were upon him: those who were in advance—those who were in the rear.

Resistance was impossible. He was borne to the ground, and overpowered instantly.

Many ropes were cast about him, and he was pinioned most securely.

By some strange fatality, the troop of soldiers who had intercepted him were the self-same ones that had before captured him and brought him to Newgate.

The surprise of the commanding officer was excessive, but from neither of the two officers could he get the least information as to the manner in which Tom had got at liberty.

Poor Tom! surely his evil star is in the ascendant, and the good fortune which has hitherto so unvaryingly been his deserted him.

This time he was tied safely behind one of the dragons, and so marshalled to Newgate.

At the prison the long absence of the highwayman and the officers had produced the utmost consternation, which, when the sheriff came to make some inquiries about him, rose to its full height.

Immediate search was made, but no trace could be found.

At last they encountered the troop having him a prisoner.

And so once again on that eventful day, was Tom King escorted by the soldiers into the vestibule of Newgate.

The joy that the governor felt at his having been captured was somewhat kept in check by Mr. Blandy.

To this gentleman Tom King was indebted for compelling the governor to put him in a clean and wholesome cell.

He did not, however, say a word against his being fettered. Perhaps he thought that only a measure of common prudence, considering the desperate and almost successful attempt at escape he had made.

The cell door was closed, and Tom was left to his own reflections.

And gloomy enough they were, goodness knows.

There was, however, one comfort: he was not deprived of daylight. There was a barred window near the roof of the cell, and this admitted a tolerable quantity of light.

Tom was very much exhausted by the efforts he had made, and by all the varied incidents which had happened on that eventful day, and this seemed to have a corresponding depressing influence on his mind.

Such is very often the case.

The hours seemed to pass away very, very slowly. He was visited twice by a turnkey, who came for the double purpose of seeing that all was right, and bringing food to the prisoner.

Of the latter, though very coarse, Tom partook plentifully. He knew the importance of properly sustaining himself in case there should be a necessity for his making use of his bodily powers.

No further incident occurred during the remainder of the day; and when night and darkness came, Tom threw himself upon the miserable bed, and fell into a slumber, disturbed by extraordinary visions of dragons, police-officers, and governors.

As for Jacks and his companion they were called upon to give an account of what had taken place after they left Bow-street, but this was done in such a rambling, contradictory, impossible way, that Mr. Tapner had them confined at once, in order to be taken before a magistrate to answer the charge of aiding and abetting the escape of a notorious criminal.

In vain they protested that such was not the case—that they had acted for the public good. Mr. Tapner was furious, and would listen to nothing, so Jacks and his friend were locked up in a cell until morning.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

DICK TURPIN ASSUMES QUITE A NEW CHARACTER, AND SUSTAINS HIS PART TO ADMIRATION.

SQUIRE EDELTON, the fair Annie, and Doctor Congreve looked at Dick with the utmost surprise. His consternation was apparent to everyone.

"But," said the squire to the lodge-keeper, "why did you refuse them admittance?"

"I—I didn't exactly refuse them, sir; but I didn't like to let them in without getting your sanction."

"Very well, then, let them in at once. They are quite welcome to search my house for the rascal. I only hope they'll catch him, that's all. But, Percy, my dear boy, what in the world is it that alarms you so?"

In good truth Turpin was in a state of terrible agitation.

He tried to move, but he was so weak, he found it to be an impossibility, and he sank back into his chair with a groan.

"Come—come," said the doctor, "it will never do for you to excite yourself in this way. You will make your wound positively dangerous."

The lodge-keeper was so anxious about his young master that he did not move to obey the orders which had been given him.

Dick raised his hand, and beckoning for the squire to approach him, with a great effort spoke.

The arm of fair Annie was thrown supportingly round his neck.

"My dear, kind sir," he said, "and, you, my beautiful girl, I have that to say which will fill you with pain and sorrow, and turn your kindness into detestation."

Both looked as bewildered as they felt when they heard this speech, and anxiously waited to hear what more was to follow.

"Let me be alone with you both," continued Dick, "and I will explain all. I dare not hope that you will forgive me."

The squire made a sign for the doctor to retire, and perceiving that the lodge-keeper still stood upon the threshold of the door, he said:

"Admit the dragons! Quick, why do you keep them at the gate?"

"Stay!" cried Turpin, excitedly. "Do not, I pray you, send to them until you have heard what I have got to say. I will promise not to detain you many minutes."

"As you wish, my dear boy; but I do hope you will explain this extraordinary behaviour of yours."

"I will."

The greatest curiosity was now depicted upon the countenances of the squire and his daughter, and they bent eagerly forward to hear the next words which should fall from his lips.

It will be seen that they both still clung to the idea that Turpin was really what they had at first taken him to be.

But the first words Dick uttered dispelled the illusion.

"I am now," he said, in a solemn voice, "going to place my life in your hands. I have come here under false pretences. I am not your son, though I have passed myself off as such. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman, of whom the soldiers at your gates are in chase."

At this revelation the squire fairly staggered back, while Annie withdrew her arm and clasped her hands together.

But Dick not giving them time to sufficiently recover from their surprise to speak, went on rapidly, though the effort was almost beyond him.

"Do not blame me too much for my impositions. I have been hunted and wounded by my foes for many hours. I eluded them, and, coming along the lane, was greeted by your daughter, who accosted me as her brother, whose arrival she had been all night expecting."

"Good heavens! Then my son—"

"One moment, sir, if you please," said Dick. "At first I was amazed, but, quickly recovering myself, can you wonder that under the circumstances I was prompted to do all in my power to favour the deception, since I knew that it was the best chance I should have of escaping from my foes. The rest you know already. The officers are at your gates thirsting for my blood. It rests with you whether you choose to surrender me wounded and helpless into their hands, or save me."

"No—no!" said Annie, "no—no! We cannot do that! It would be base indeed."

A faint smile came to Dick's lips as he heard the assurance of his safety.

"I knew you would save me! I was sure of it."

"But," said the squire, nervously, "I don't see!"

"You have nothing more to do," said Dick, "than to assure the dragons, when they search the place, that I am your son. There is time to remove me to a bed-chamber, and then suspicion will not be excited."

It is hard to say in what way the squire would have acted had he been left to himself. But his daughter spoke, and with him her will was law.

"Oh, yes, father! We must save him, indeed we must! Quick—quick! Run down to the gate and tell

the dragons they are free to search the place; and you, sir," she added, addressing Dick, "come with me!"

She took him by the arm as she spoke, and raised him to his feet.

Then, by her aid, he managed to stagger across the room.

The brain of the squire himself was in a perfect whirl. He was a simple-minded man, unused to excitement of any kind, and the startling character of the events which had just occurred was sufficient to utterly bewilder him.

"Heaven bless you!" said Dick, as with great difficulty he ascended the staircase. "Your disposition must be a gentle one indeed, or you would have resented the cruel cheat which I put upon you. But the love of life and liberty is a dominant feeling in the breasts of all, and to preserve those treasures a man will do what he would not think of doing under ordinary circumstances."

"I can understand that," said Annie, quietly. "But it grieves me to the soul to think that one so capable of better things, as I am sure you are, should have adopted such a course of life."

"Don't reproach me now," said Turpin. "Wait until you know all. When I am better, and this present danger has passed away, I will tell you everything, and I have, I fear, some intelligence to give you respecting Percy."

"My brother. Oh! speak—speak!"

"Not now—not now. And, hark! I can hear even now my pursuers are close at hand."

"In here—in here," said Annie, opening a door. "This is Percy's own room. I must leave you to shift for yourself."

"A thousand, thousand thanks for your kindness to me," said Dick, kissing the hand that had supported him. "Never shall I forget this day, or cease to feel grateful for the service you have done me."

Dick's words were uttered in such a plaintive and grateful tone of voice that the tears rose up into the eyes of the beautiful and generous girl who we see could feel pity for an outcast like Dick was.

Ashamed of her emotion she turned away, and Dick closed the door of the room in which he had been ushered.

It is wonderful what a power the mind has over the body. Although so weak that he could scarcely crawl, yet Dick was able, by an exertion of his will, to call up enough strength to undress himself, secrete his clothes under the mattress of the bed, and then get into bed himself.

When he laid down, such a sensation of deadly sickness came over him, that it seemed as though the world was slipping away from him.

The truth was he was upon the point of swooning, and so soon as this thought occurred to him, he was able to recall his scattered energies, and successfully repel the feeling.

He knew that should they enter and find him insensible, they would imagine him to be dead, and under that impression do or say something that would lead to his apprehension.

And so, although only semi-conscious, he lay there straining his sense of hearing to the utmost to know what was going on.

CHAPTER XC.

DICK TURPIN DISGUISES HIMSELF AS A FARMER, AND VISITS TOM KING IN HIS CELL AT NEWGATE.

As may naturally be supposed, the suspicions of the dragons were excited by the long absence of the lodge-keeper, who had simply requested them to wait there, and not enter until he had informed his master.

But when they saw the old gentleman himself walking down to meet them with a face of sorrow, those suspicions were almost dissipated.

At his approach the officer dismounted from his steed, and, bowing respectfully to the squire, said—

"I regret the errand we have come upon, but the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, has been traced to the immediate vicinity of your mansion, and there the traces end. We are empowered by law to search whatever places we may think proper, and it will be our duty to search your house and grounds."

"You are perfectly at liberty to do so," said the squire, "and I am sure from your behaviour hitherto that you will act with all possible consideration, especially when

I tell you that my only son, just returned after a military service in India, is lying dangerously ill in the house, and any bustle or excitement might be productive of fatal results."

"You shall have nothing to fear on that head. We will take your word that the highwayman is not secreted in your house, and merely search through the grounds."

"Do so; I shall be obliged. And you, sir, can accompany me to the house yourself, while your men do the duty. It will be, I suppose, more satisfactory for you to go all over the house?"

"It would certainly, since then I should be able to speak with confidence; but, however, I cannot under the circumstances think of doing so."

"But you must, as a particular favour to myself, come with me, I beg. The pair of us can walk over the whole of the building without creating the least disturbance."

"I cannot refuse you," said the officer, and then turning to his men, he gave them instructions relative to searching the grounds.

The squire then put his hand on the officer's arm.

"You will excuse me," he said, "but my son's profession is the same as yours, and so you see I look upon you as a friend."

"You are very good," said the officer. "I can quite understand the feeling."

In this way, as though they had been friends from boyhood, they made their way along the avenue, across the lawn, and up the steps in front of the mansion.

On the threshold they met the squire's daughter, Annie.

It was evident that her great beauty made a deep impression upon the heart of the officer.

On her side, Annie could not fail to be struck with the handsome appearance of the soldier.

As may be expected, the officer did not walk over the house. He could not think of disturbing them so much, he said, and so he sat down in the drawing-room to drink a glass of wine.

He remained contentedly enough until one of his men presented himself with the report that, though they had searched the whole of the grounds, they could find no traces of the man they sought.

Upon receipt of this intelligence, the officer was obliged to take his leave, which he did with manifest reluctance.

And so the danger which had so menaced our hero passed away.

As the day advanced he got much better, and just at nightfall, to the surprise of the squire and his family, their strange guest came downstairs.

It was in vain they remonstrated with him, and entreated him to return to his bed. Dick would listen to nothing of the sort.

In fact, as he suffered only from loss of blood, his vigorous constitution quickly recovered, and though still weak, yet he was able to walk with firmness.

He insisted, then, upon the squire and his wife and daughter accompanying him into the drawing-room, and while there, he made the worthy family acquainted with those facts of which the reader is already cognizant.

The intelligence which Turpin gave them concerning the wreck of the *Ranedeer* filled their breasts with grief.

"And now," said Dick, "while heartily thanking you for the inestimable service you have conferred upon me, I am not without a hope, as you are in possession of the facts of the case, that you will forgive me for the imposition I have practised."

"We do," said Annie; "but oh! make now a promise to cease to be obnoxious to the laws."

"I cannot," said Dick. "Do not think me ungrateful. Through me my old comrade has been made a prisoner, and I conceive it to be my duty, as I caused his arrest, to set him free again, and I will do it."

There was so much firmness in the way Dick pronounced these words that they forebore to urge him further.

"To-night," he continued, "I set out for London. If you will direct me to the stable, I will saddle my mare and depart. May you forget there is in existence such a one as I am."

The warm sympathies of Annie's nature were all on the side of the highwayman, in whom she felt the greatest interest, and, therefore, she said—

"We shall never do that, but always be on the look-out to hear that you have done better."

"Ferewell," said Dick, as he walked towards the door of the room, "farewell. Beneath this roof I have met with more kindness than I have done in the whole of my previous career."

Then hastily leaving the apartment, and not allowing the squire or his daughter to make any further remark, he directed his steps towards the servant's offices.

In a few minutes afterwards the squire heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and he knew the famous highwayman had gone.

Then, being left alone, all three gave way to their grief for the untimely fate of the much-loved Percy.

CHAPTER XCI.

DICK TURPIN MAKES EVERY EFFORT TO RESCUE HIS FRIEND TOM KING.

TWENTY-FOUR hours after the event we have just related a man, whose clothes were dragged with mud, walked with a slow and unsteady footstep along that part of Russell-street, Covent-garden, which leads from Drury-lane to Bow-street.

Upon reaching Crown-court he turned up it, and then passing into Martlett's-court emerged into Bow-street, just opposite where the Floral-hall now stands.

He leaned for a moment against the corner of the court and looked up and down the street.

At that hour few people were abroad, and the street itself was almost in utter darkness.

A little lower down on the left of where he stood was the Bow-street police-station.

It could be recognized by the lamp which was burning over the door.

This man, who thus stood at the corner, was our old friend Turpin.

He had accomplished in safety the journey between Squire Edelton's and London.

He had taken up his quarters with Matthew Gale, the landlord of the "White Horse," in Drury-lane,

His present errand was to a costumer's at the corner of Hart-street, from whom he wished to purchase a disguise, and he had chosen that silent hour of the night to steal out of White Horse-yard and reach it unobserved.

Feeling satisfied that no enemies were lurking about, Dick crossed the road, and in another instant was standing at the door of the shop he sought.

It was closed, but of that circumstance Turpin took no notice. Old Matthew had given him full instructions, and he rang a bell, the handle of which was placed almost out of sight in the carving of the door-post.

After a minute or so's delay the door was opened, and a little decrepit old man appeared upon the threshold.

He carried in his hand a candle, which he shielded from the draught with his hand.

A few words sufficed to let him know what Dick wanted and with many obeisances he ushered him into his shop.

"I can suit you exactly, sir," he said, "and I am very glad to have the opportunity of doing a favour for my friend, Mr. Gale. Anyone that he sends here must be welcome."

"I want," said Dick, "a first-rate disguise. Do not trouble about payment, I can assure you that it will be enough to satisfy you."

"Just so, sir. What kind of costume would you like, sir?"

"That is a matter I have scarcely considered. I shall leave it to you to make me look as different as you can. That is the chief object."

"You mean, sir, I take it, disguise you so effectually that your most intimate friend would fail to recognize you?"

"Just so. Do that and you shall have such a reward as you have never hoped for."

"Come into my room, if you please, sir. You see I am a lonely man, with neither kith nor kin, so the place is not so tidy as it might be."

The room into which the old costumer ushered Dick certainly was not so tidy as it might be, as the old man had it. In fact, it was littered with articles of every description.

The costume which this singular being chose for Dick, was one such as was worn by north-country farmers at the period.

When Dick simply put on the clothes it made a wonderful difference to him, but the costumer did not stop there. He cut Dick's hair close to his head, and fitted on a wig of long silvery-looking hair.

"I have done a great deal in this way, sir. When I was younger I used to dress the characters before they went on the stage, and there was no one could make up like me. Just hold up your face to the light, sir, if you please."

Dick did so, and then the old man proceeded to cover it with a very thin solution of some kind which in a minute gave his skin the appearance of extreme old age.

Next he very skilfully with a fine brush drew some lines and then shaded them, and with so much art that no one would have thought they were other than actual wrinkles unless by means of his touch he had satisfied himself upon the point.

The old man seemed to take the greatest possible delight in his work, and he paused every now and then to admire his own skill.

Nearly three hours were consumed before he pronounced Dick ready.

He then led him into the shop, and made him stand before a large mirror that was there.

When Turpin saw his reflected image he uttered a cry of disbelief, so utterly changed was he.

It was a strange feeling that, but there was nothing about him to assure him of his identity.

When, however, after rummaging in a corner the costumer found an old cross-handled walking-stick and Dick by his instructions bent his back and leaned totteringly upon it, the disguise was indeed perfect.

"I shall fear nothing now," he muttered. "I shall run not the slightest risk! Thanks, old man!" he added aloud, "this will be a good night's work for you."

As he spoke, he pressed into his skinny hands twenty guineas.

"I am glad you are satisfied, munificent sir," said the costumer. "I shall be glad always, for the sake of my old friend, to do what I can for you."

"Say no more! What time is it?"

"Close upon four, sir."

"No later?"

"No earlier, sir," said the old man, with a smile. "It will be daylight soon. All you will have to do will be to recollect you are an aged man, and walk accordingly."

"Fear nothing! and now, if you will allow me, I will go! Good night!"

"Good morning! noble sir!" said the old man, as he held open the door of the shop. "Good morning!"

Taking care, as the old man had directed him, to keep up the appearance of the character he had assumed, Dick walked slowly in the direction of the "White Horse."

It will be a good test of the efficacy of this disguise if old Matthew is unable to penetrate it," he muttered. "I will try."

The "White Horse" was one of these public-houses where the greatest business is done during the night, so that when Dick arrived, he found it much the same as he had left it.

He tottered up to the bar, and said, in a capitally assumed voice—

"Can you let me have a bed to-night, guv'ner?"

Matthew was as usual standing at the counter, and though he looked curiously at Dick, yet he did not recognize him.

"No," he said, "we don't let beds."

"Oh! gammon!" said Turpin, in his natural voice, "open the door and let me in!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Matthew. "It's actually the Squire. Well, I will say this, my old friend hasn't forgotten his art, that's quite clear!"

"Be cautious," said Turpin, looking warily about him.

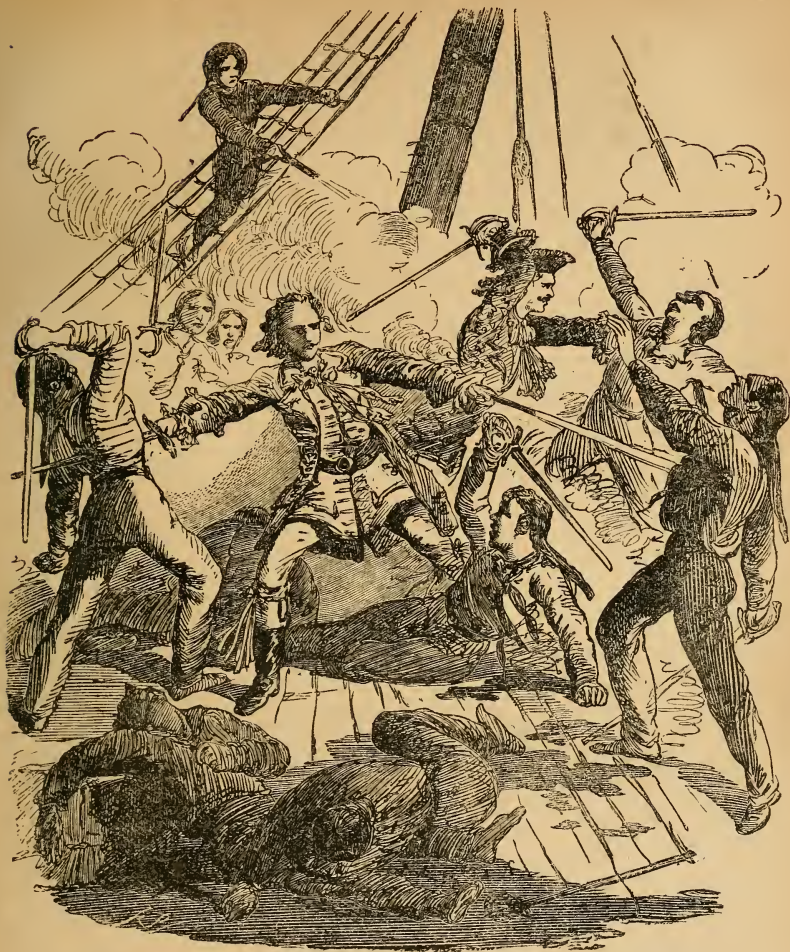
"Oh! it's all right. Come in."

Matthew held open the little half-glass door leading into the bar and Dick entered.

The worthy landlord's admiration at the excellence of Dick's disguise knew no bounds.

"Oh! it's first-rate," he said. "You run hardly any risk if you'll only be careful."

"Risk or no risk," said Turpin, "I mean to pay Tom King a visit, and if I don't get him out of the prison as very odd to me. It's my duty, and I'll do it."



SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL ARE ATTACKED BY THE BOAT'S CREW.

"Then, if that's the case, he's safe enough,"

"I hope so."

"Dick, my boy, I like you more than ever. It is no. often we find anyone as will stand by a friend at a pinch."

"Perhaps not, but there are few, I think, who can boast of having such a friend as Tom King."

"Oh! he's one of the right sort, I know," said old Matthew, "though I haven't seen much of him myself."

"That pleasure has yet to come."

"But, now, tell me this. I haven't mentioned it before, but what is the plan of operations you have sketched out?"

"To tell you the truth I don't know. I was going to consult with you upon the subject."

"Very good. I think it will be in my power to be of more assistance to you than you think for."

"I am glad to hear it. And now tell me what you should advise?"

The worthy landlord reflected for a moment.
No. 19.—BLACK BESS.

"Just come in this back-room a little while in case anyone should happen to come in."

"It will only be prudent."

"That's true enough, and I never know when a robin might pop in. But as for this little room, it's quite private, and we can talk there without fear of being interrupted or overheard."

While speaking, old Matthew ushered Dick into a small parlour, which was consecrated to the use of himself and his very special friends.

"Charlotte! Charlotte!" he said, "look to the bar."

Then he closed the door of communication, and going to the sideboard, took from it two decanters of wine and some glasses, which he placed on the table near his friend.

"This done, he took a seat nearly opposite to him."

"Pour out a glass, Dick, lad," he said. "It ain't possible to talk business with a dry mouth."

Turpin poured out a glass for himself, and one also for the landlord, and then he said—

"Now, Matthew, my friend, there is no time to lose. Let us begin."

"With all my heart. The first thing I want to ascertain is your motive for going to Newgate?"

"My motive?"

"Yes, is it simply a visit of condolence, or do you intend to give him some assistance towards making his escape?"

"Why the latter, most certainly."

"Very well, then. Now do you suppose you will be able to walk off with him under your arm?"

Dick laughed.

"Not exactly; but I know very well what you mean."

"Of course you do. It is no good your running such a frightful risk as venturing into Newgate without you accomplish some good by it."

"True. Now, Matthew, pray speak out. I know, from your way, as well as if you told me, that you have some capital plan in your head."

"No. I can't exactly say I have; but I think, if we put our heads together, we shall easily enough be able to concert one."

"That's sense."

"Now, the first thing is the going into Newgate. Have you justly calculated the amount of danger you will be likely to encounter?"

"Not I," said Dick, carelessly. "It is time enough to think about danger when danger comes."

Old Matthew shook his head.

"You are too reckless by half."

"And all the better," replied Dick, for I do believe if I had stopped to be cautious, and such like, I should have been nabbed long ago."

"Perhaps you are right. However, let us confine ourselves to the subject we have in hand. In the first place, are you known by any of the officials at Newgate?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"That is a point in your favour, then. You may rest assured that every visitor Tom King has will be very closely scrutinized indeed, and you must take care that they do not penetrate your disguise."

"Trust me for that."

"You will observe, Dick, that all along I have avoided saying anything to dissuade you from going on your perilous errand, because I believe it to be useless. Your mind seemed to be quite made up."

"And not only that," said Turpin, "I consider it a point of honour to visit him, and run every risk in the endeavour to accomplish his escape. It was through me he got into the hands of the grabe, and it shall be through me that he gets out of them."

"That's a proper enough feeling, I do not pretend to deny," said the landlord, "but it's carrying it to an excess, I rather think."

"Pho! pho!"

"Ah! you may pho! pho! as much as you like; but look here."

"Well."

"You said just now I had some plan in my head."

"I know I did."

"Well, I hadn't, but, what was pretty much the same thing, I had something to propose."

"What was it? Quick! tell me!"

"Oh! don't be impatient. All I wanted to do was to suggest a little improvement in your plan."

"I shall be thankful to you for it."

"Shall you. That's all right then. Now look here, I am an older man than you."

"I don't dispute that for a moment."

"I could play the part of Tom's father first-rate, better than you could, I conceit myself."

"No, no, Matthew, that won't do."

"What won't?"

"Why, you want to persuade me into letting you go instead of me, but it won't do, I tell you."

"But I tell you it will. They won't suspect me for a moment, for I should go in my natural character."

"You won't go at all. I am quite resolved upon this point, Matthew, so let us waste no more words about it. My determination is, despite the peril, to see Tom King myself, and to tell him that I will free him if I have to pull Newgate down, stone by stone, to do it."

"I suppose you will have your own way," said Matthew, as he coolly poured out another glass of wine.

"You are right. I have every confidence in my disguise, and in my own capabilities to sustain the action of the part I have assumed. You now know my irrevocable determination. There is yet some time before the prison gates will be open, and let us occupy that interval in reducing to shape and method some plan for Tom's escape."

CHAPTER XCII.

OLD MATTHEW, THE LANDLORD, DISPLAYS INVENTIVE POWERS OF NO MEAN ORDER.

"NOTHING will please me better," replied Matthew Gale. "Let us try to think of something good."

"My rude idea was," said Turpin, "to convey to Tom some tools that would enable him to free himself from his fetters, for that they will iron him heavily I have not the smallest doubt."

"You may depend they will."

"A file or two would at any rate be useful to him; but I must confess I was rather puzzled to know how to convey them to him. I suppose when I enter the lobby I shall be searched."

"You will, and not only that, a turnkey will be present during your interview with him, whose special duty it will be to see that nothing passes from you to the prisoner."

"Ah! that makes it awkward, does it not?"

"It does."

"Now, I'll tell you how I thought of managing to overcome the difficulty. Let me hear whether you think it feasible."

"I am all attention."

"I thought of secreting a couple of spring files in the lining of my hat. You see it is stiffened with wire, and so they would be most likely passed over unnoticed. What do you think?"

"I think so, too, but there is a chance they might be discovered. They are sharp chaps there, and down to every move."

"I suppose so."

"And then, supposing you got in with the files all right, how should you manage to convey them to Tom?"

"Well that would entirely depend upon circumstances. I should contrive to let him know what I had brought, and where they were, and drop my hat carelessly somewhere: then he might either abstract them while I was talking or pick my hat up and give it me, and take them out at the same time, as opportunity offered."

"It's a very good scheme, but—"

"Ah! is there a but in it?"

"There is."

"What is it?"

"I think a better could be found."

"Do you? then that's as good as saying you have thought of one. What is it?"

"You have divined the fact, Dick, I confess; I have thought of a plan, but whether you will think the same about it as I do is more than I can tell you. However, you shall hear it."

"I'd wager my head it's something uncommonly good."

"Don't be too sanguine about it, for fear it should fall short of your expectations."

"Pray tell it me, and do not keep me in suspense any longer."

"You know the Old Bailey, of course?"

"You mean the street?"

"Yes."

"I know it very well."

"Then did you ever notice on the side opposite to the prison a shop where they sell meat pies?"

"I can't say I did."

"Well never mind, that don't matter. There is a meat pie shop there, and it is kept by a man named Elisha Coles."

"But I don't see"—

"What that has got to do with it, you were going to say."

"I was."

"Stop a moment, and you shall hear. Mr. Coles is a very old and very particular friend of mine."

"Oh!"

"His shop is very much frequented by the prison officials. In fact, his principal customers."

"So I suppose."

"And not only do a great many come in there and eat a small pie while they stand at the counter, but those who are on duty are in the habit of sending over for one of the large pies that he makes, and which is enough for dinner for three men."

"But what on earth?"—

"Hold your noise, and don't interrupt. Now, Mr. Coles, as I said before, is a very great friend of mine."

"Hang it, I know you did; make haste."

"And what is more, I am a great friend of Mr. Coles."

The landlord was amusing himself a little at the expense of Dick's impatience.

"Now what are you trying to say?"

"Simply this; when you go to visit Tom, stay some time, and then send over for one of my friend Coles's pies."

"And how on earth would that benefit me?"

"Can't you see?"

"No, I'll be shot if I can."

"Then you're not so discerning as I took you to be, that's all. I shall take advantage of my friend Coles's friendship."

"In what manner?"

"I'll tell you. I'll go to him, and get him to b'de a couple of files in the crust of one of his pies."

"Ha! I see now."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of the scheme?"

"Oh! it's capital; but"—

"Is there a but in my plan as well as in yours?"

"There is, and a good-sized but, too."

"Tell me what it is."

"Why, supposing your friend put the saws in the pie-crust, how is he to know which one to give?"

"Oh! you leave that to him; he'll manage that without any trouble at all. You have only got to send out for a pie, and when it comes, you may rely upon there being a couple of the best steel saws in London in the crust of it."

"Then, of course," said Turpin, as the excellence of the stratagem became more and more patent to him, "it will be easy to sit down to eat this pie, but how shall I know in what part of the crust the saws are?"

"You will easily be able to tell that; I will get him to put some little ornament on it—you know what I mean—and just above where the saws are there shall be two of these dough ornaments stuck together."

"Very good, Matthew," said Turpin, in a tone of exultation, "it is really wonderful how you get over the difficulties. I don't know whether it's an original idea, but whether it is or not it is the best I ever heard of. Why there will be no trouble in the affair at all now, if you can only insure the right pie being sent to the right persons."

"You let Coles alone for that."

"I will."

"Then you think it better than taking them in the hat?"

"A thousand times better, Matthew, a hundred thousand times! It is the cleverest thing I ever heard of."

Old Matthew's eyes sparkled, for he was no exception to human nature generally, and it is always sweet to be commended.

"And yet it is so simple."

"That, in my opinion, is the best part of it. And now, to make your mind quite easy upon the whole affair, I will tell you how Coles will arrange about the pie."

"Ah! do tell me that. As you say, it will be an additional satisfaction."

"Besides which I have thought of a means by which you can assist him."

"Let us hear, then, by all means."

"You must remember the part you are to personate is that of a north country farmer. Now they have a peculiar way of speaking which I daresay you can imitate pretty well."

"Pretty well."

"As you must be aware, too, they have peculiar ways of expressing themselves."

"I know they have."

"Very well. When you order the pie, tell the man to

"Slack baked?"

"Yes. Don't forget. It means one that is only lightly or partially baked. Not browned, you understand?"

"Oh! I see."

The expression is not altogether uncommon in London here, owing to the many country people that are constantly visiting it. Now, when the turnkey asks for a pie slack baked, Coles will at once comprehend it is for you."

"Just so."

"You won't forget, or make any mistake?"

"Oh! no, it is a common enough expression where I come from."

"Where is that?"

"Essex."

"Oh! indeed. Then so much the better. Then to make quite certain, Coles will make some remark to the turnkey as to who wants a slack baked pie, and then ten to one if the man don't tell him it is for Tom King's father, who has come to visit him."

"And then, of course, Coles will have no hesitation in handing him the pie that has the saws concealed in the crust."

"None, as you say."

"Matthew, I should never have given you credit for managing an affair with so much skill. It's really first-rate, and does you infinite credit."

"Oh! don't say any more about it. Fill up your glass, and let us drink success to the scheme."

"With all the pleasure in life. And now, having arranged all this so very satisfactorily, what had we better do?"

"Lie down and get an hour or two's rest. It is only a little after six now, and they won't admit you to the prison until ten."

"Be it so, then. My mind now is quite at rest, and I shall be none the worse for three hours' sleep, and I know I can take it in safety under your roof."

"You can. Depend upon it, I will give you timely notice of the approach of any danger."

"I do not anticipate any," said Turpin.

"No, nor I; but still it is best to be prepared."

"It is, for when it does come it comes most unexpectedly."

"You will be able to find your way to your old chamber, I suppose?"

"You mean the one I slept in last night."

"Yes, and that night when you came here half scared and badly wounded."

"Oh! I can find my way there easily enough. Good morning, and many thanks."

"Don't mention it, I beg."

"I can trust to you to see about the pie."

"You can. Depend upon me."

"I know I can with safety do so. Good morning."

Turpin made his way upstairs, and entering the room which had been set aside for his own use, he threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XCIII.

INFORMS THE READER TO WHAT EXTENT OLD MATTHEW'S SCHEME WAS SUCCESSFUL.

FEW are there, we imagine, who have not noticed how great an influence the mind has over sleep. To go to bed with a resolution to rise at a certain hour is sufficient to cause one to wake about that time. How this it is impossible to say, but it is a fact nevertheless.

Such was the case with Dick in the present instance. When he laid down on the bed the last thing about which he thought was that he must wake up at nine in order to pay his promised visit to Newgate.

Exactly to the minute he opened his eyes, but he could tell he had not had a sufficient quantity of sleep to thoroughly refresh him. Nevertheless, his intention was uppermost in his mind, and he sprang to his feet.

It took him but a few minutes to adjust his attire, and then, having every appearance of a venerable country farmer, he descended the stairs, and entered the bar.

As he fully expected, he found Matthew had already gone out. His errand would, of course, be to his friend the doctor in the Old Bailey.

Dick Turpin's heart was light when he turned away from the "White Horse."

Already he saw in his mind's eye Tom King once more in freedom, for that he would manage to make an escape he did not entertain the smallest doubt.

But, notwithstanding his elation of spirits, he was not oblivious of the fact that he was to personate a feeble old man, and he walked along with a slow and staggering gait accordingly, supporting himself upon the strong cross-handled stick with which the costumer in Covent-garden had supplied him.

More than one person turned a curious and inquisitive glance upon him, which made Dick apprehensive to a degree.

And yet his fears were groundless.

It was not any inconsistency or imperfection of his disguise that caused the people to look. It was his old-fashioned attire.

But these gazers had the natural effect of making Dick less reliant upon his disguise than he was, which was a pity, as his over-caution might be provocative of suspicion.

Just as he passed under Temple Bar a thought struck him, and he immediately proceeded to act upon it.

At the very next public-house he came to, which was at the corner of Chancery-lane, he stopped.

He walked slowly up to the bar, and called for gin.

As he was served with it he put down the money, and at the same time inquired whether they would put half-a-pint in a bottle for him.

He said this in such a mysterious way that a smile came over the face of the young woman at the bar, besides which, she was tickled at the idea of anyone asking such a question, and she set him down for a rascal at once.

The half-pint bottle of spirit was produced, and Dick paid for it, and left the house.

"Ha! ha! This will throw those stupid Newgate fellows off the scent, I rather think."

What Dick meant will be quickly enough seen.

He walked gently down Fleet-street, and up Ludgate-hill.

Then round the corner into the Old Bailey.

As he reached the door at which prisoners were admitted, he glanced at St. Sepulchre's clock, and saw that it was nearly twenty minutes past ten.

He tapped timorously at the wicket.

Little did Dick ever think that he should voluntarily seek an entrance into Newgate; and if anyone had told him the day would come when he would walk up to the very portal, and knock at it with the broad light of day looking at him he would have ridiculed the idea as most improbably absurd.

And yet there he was.

Strange things do come to pass.

The surly door-keeper dashed aside the little sliding panel that covered a small aperture in the door defended by twisted iron bars.

"What's the row now, eh?" he growled.

Dick set up a capital imitation of an old man's voice.

"Alas! alas!"

He shook his head tremulously, and forced some moisture into his eyes.

Bang went the little panel.

Turpin repeated the summons.

It was disregarded.

He knocked again, but somewhat louder.

The janitor appeared again.

"Be off with you," he said, "or I will give you in charge. There's no vagrants allowed about this place."

"Kind, good sir," said Dick, submissively. "Thomas, Thomas! my son Thomas!"

"Eh?"

"My son Thomas—my poor weak, misguided son, good sir."

"Oh! you want to see some one, eh? Why didn't you say so at first. I thought you came begging."

"That was a little mistake, noble sir."

"Bah! Who do you want?"

"Thomas!"

"Go to the devil. Who's Thomas?"

"My poor son."

"Thomas who, idiot?" roared the jailer.

"King, good sir. Thomas King."

"Eh, what? Do you mean to say Tom King the high toymen is your son?"

"Alas! yes," replied Dick, in a still more lachrymose voice.

"And you want to see him?"

"Even so. That is with your permission, kind sir."

"Oh! bother. Come in."

The ponderous door was opened to the extent of a few inches, and Dick, with many sighs and groans and shakes of the head, made his way into the lobby.

"Here, Winch," cried the jailer to one of his companions, who was sitting on a bench at a few yards' distance. "Here's this old fogey come to see Tom King."

The man who had been named Winch, and who, for a wonder, possessed what few Newgate officials did, an unforbearing countenance, gave a grunt and rose to his feet.

"This way," he said. "But stop a minute, what have you got about you?"

"About me?"

"Yes. Have you got anything hidden in your clothes? I must search you."

"No—no—good sir—very good sir—no—no—don't, I beg."

"Ah! you're frightened, are you? That shows you've got something hidden about you."

"No—indeed, no."

Dick acted being in a state of nervous trepidation to perfection.

Winch, however, with a look of great sagacity on his face, walked up to the supposititious old man, and in a very experienced way felt all over his clothing.

At last he came to a pocket that was in the breast of the coat, and where Dick had placed the bottle of gin.

The feel at once told him what it was.

"Ha! ha!" he said, as he drew it forth despite the feeble resistance Dick made to his doing so. "Gin, eh? We never allow no spirits to be taken in."

"Oh! think of my poor son, good sir, in his cold cell, and let his wretched father take him a little comfort. Do, good, kind sir—do!"

"No, its against the rules. I'll put it here, and you can have it when you go away."

"Thanks, good sir. But is it against the rules for you to give it?"

"Well, I don't know as it is," said Winch.

"Then," replied Dick, "if my poor boy can't have it do you. I could not bear the idea of no one having it. Its the very best old Hollands."

"Schiedam?"

"That's it. I always drink it myself, and I know my poor boy likes it. Alack! alack! that ever I should live to see this day. Alack! alack!"

"Come, come, old chap, don't take on so," said Winch, who was considerably mollified by the present of the half-pint of gin. "He may get off all right. This way, sir. You can take hold of my arm, if you like."

"Many thanks, sir, many thanks; I am getting old now, very old."

"You'll outlive many of the young ones yet," said Winch, with a peculiar smile, as he, and Dick leaning on his arm, entered those gloomy corridors leading to Tom's dungeon.

CHAPTER XCIV.

DICK FINDS THE VERY ATMOSPHERE OF NEWGATE IS FULL OF PERIL TO HIM.

COULD but some unseen power have whispered to Winch, the turnkey, that it was no other than the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin, who was leaning on his arm, how utterly astounded he would have been, and what an entire change would have taken place in his demeanour.

But it so happened that not the faintest breath of suspicion dimmed his mind, which may be attributed not only to the excellency of the disguise, but to the admirable manner in which Dick had played his part.

His imitation of a timid, humble, decrepit old man was really wonderful.

A few minutes brought them to the door of the cell in which Tom King was confined, and Winch made the complicated fastenings, and pushed it open.

One keen glance was sufficient to enable Dick to take in a distinct idea of the position of the locks and bolts.

Then he stepped into the cell.

Winch followed close at his heels, but still stood only on the threshold.

He amused himself by swinging his monster bunch of keys to and fro.

The cell, of which Tom was so unwilling an occupant, though not what could with propriety be called comfortable, yet was so when compared with some of the others in the prison.

The floor, which was composed of large flag stones, was dry and clean and so, too, were the walls, while a grated window near the roof permitted entrance to a moderate amount of light.

But though Dick noted all these things, the principal portion of his attention was riveted upon his comrade.

Tom was sitting in a dejected-looking attitude upon his bed. His head was bent, and his eyes rested on the floor beneath his feet.

Heavy irons hampered his limbs, and made motion of any kind a matter of great difficulty.

And now Dick ran the principal danger.

It was in the highest degree probable that Tom, from his intimate acquaintance with Turpin, would penetrate his disguise, and, under the impulse of the moment, either say or do something that would rouse the suspicions of the turnkey.

The risk had to be run.

So immersed was Tom King in his meditations, that he did not appear cognizant of the fact that any one had entered his dungeon, nor did he lift his head until Winch said, in loud tones—

"A visitor!"

Tom looked up.

He gave a sudden start as his glance fell upon Turpin.

He knew him instantly.

His very lips turned pale.

But ere he could any further commit himself, Dick spoke—

"Tom! Tom! Alas! alas! my poor son—that over I should have lived to see you like this. My poor, poor boy."

Brief as was the time it took for Turpin to utter these words, yet it was long enough to allow Tom to recover from the first shock of his surprise, and make him aware under what title it was that Turpin had paid him this visit.

He did not trust himself to rise and speak though, but merely assumed his former cast-down attitude.

Dick seated himself by his side on the rude pallet, and, taking his hand in his own, he said, in the same well-assumed tones—

"Ah! Thomas, Thomas! I knowed this would be the end; I was sure of it. I shall die a miserable old man and it will be all your fault. But I won't reproach thee, lad. I see you're down-hearted now, so I won't say another word. I won't, Thomas, I won't."

Winch was pretty well used to this kind of thing in reality, and yet he did not perceive in this instance that it was spurious.

He lingered a minute just inside the door of the cell, and then went out into the passage, where he solaced himself with an instalment of the bottle of gin.

The strict letter of his duty was to remain present during the interviews between prisoners and their visitors. But this was merely to see that nothing was handed to them in the shape of tools or spirits.

Winch in this instance felt sure he had nothing to fear on either of these grounds, his search had been so very systematic; and as he was quite tired of hearing reproaches and sorrowful replies, he gladly enough betook himself to the corridor.

No sooner had he gone than Tom opened his mouth to speak, but Turpin, by an expressive gesture, stopped him.

"I know what you are going to say," he whispered, "but never mind it. Listen to me, there is no time to lose."

"The risk?"

"I know all that. Silence! I have come here in order that you may effect your escape."

"How—how!"

"Be patient. What could you do if you had two steel spring saws?"

"Two steel spring saws? Anything. With a crow-bar get out of Newgate."

"Speak lower, the turnkey may be listening. As yet he has no suspicions."

"Your disguise is certainly an excellent one."

"But it did not deceive you."

"Oh! no."

"You knew me at the first glance."

"I did."

"But that is nothing. Listen to my plan."

"I am all attention."

"I shall send out for a pie."

"A pie?"

"Yes, a meat pie. In the crust of which will be hidden the two saws of which I spoke."

"I see."

"I will cut the pie, and manage to give you the right portion. I must leave it to your own legibility to take them out, and secrete them somewhere."

"You may safely do so. Oh! Dick, my friend, I was beginning to despair, but now you have filled me with new hope."

"That is well."

"With two such tools much I am certain can be done, and it will go hard if I do not work my way to freedom."

"That is the way to speak. Resolve upon accomplishing your aim, and you have more than half succeeded."

"I know it."

"And now for the pie."

"Be careful, Dick."

"You can trust me."

"Yes, but recollect for the last few minutes you have been speaking to me with your own voice—in a whisper, it is true, but still with your own voice. I merely asked you to be careful lest you should forget yourself."

"Thanks, my friend; your caution is welcome. Now I am on my guard."

"That is well."

Dick rose from his seat.

He made his way towards the door.

The turnkey was leaning with his back against the wall of the corridor at a few paces from the door of the cell.

He was taking another sip at the bottle of gin.

Dick Turpin walked close up to him, and then said in the humble oblique tones he had at first adopted—

"My kind, good sir——"

Winch was so intent upon what he was about that he did not notice Dick's approach, and when he heard a voice at his elbow he gave a great start, and, as a natural consequence, spilt over so much of the gin.

"Confound you," he said, in a great rage. "What do you want now?"

"A thousand pardons, good, kind sir, a thousand pardons. I made sure you heard my footstep. Oh! how sorry I am to see such good liquor wasted!"

"Not half so sorry as I am."

"But sir—good sir. My poor son is hungry."

"Oh! he be d—d!"

"If you please, good sir. But when he said he was hungry, he put two or three things in my head."

"Yes, curse it, and one of them was to come out in the passage, and speak to me and make me lose half the bottle of gin."

"Believe me, kind sir, I am very sorry. But there are worse losses in the world than that, because it is one that can be repaired."

"Well, yes, I suppose it can," said Winch. "But will you repair it, that's the point?"

CHAPTER XCV.

IN WHICH TWO NEW AND VERY IMPORTANT CHARACTERS ARE INTRODUCED TO THE READER OF THIS HISTORY.

"KIND sir."

"Oh! don't be so infernally polite, but say at once."

"I will."

"You will?"

"I certainly will."

"Replace the bottle of gin."

"With pleasure, good sir."

"No, not with pleasure, but with another bottle."

"That's what I mean."
 "Then it don't so much signify, does it?"
 "It does not, as you say, kind sir. But to go back to the remark I was about to make."

"Yes, yes."

"When you interrupted me."

"Confound it, yes!"

"My poor son Tom said he was hungry."

"You said that before."

"I know I did; but what a dreadful thing it is to be hungry and have nothing to eat!"

"I don't doubt it, but he can have plenty of bread and water at dinner-time, so that isn't his case."

"True, kind sir, but that is as good as nothing. Besides, it is a long time to wait."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I am telling you, my very good sir."

"Then why don't you make haste?"

"I am, good sir, but I am getting old, you see, and infirm, and if"—

"I tell you what it is, old cock, if you don't say what you want at once, I'm"—

"When he said—that is, my poor unhappy, deluded son Tom—said he was hungry, it brought to mind that, as I passed down the street on the opposite side of the way, I saw there a shop where they sold the most luscious-looking pies."

"Coles'?"

"That may be his name, kind sir. I don't say it isn't."

"Then you know the shop I mean?"

"In course I do; everybody in the prison knows it. Why, we have a matter of thirty or forty pies from there every day."

"Indeed. How singular. Why you must be first-rate customers of his."

"I rather believe it, we are; but have you gone all this long way round to say you wanted one of his pies?"

"That is what I wanted to say, kind sir; but I wished to make so bold as to make a suggestion or two."

"Out with them, then."

"Why, I thought, that though my poor boy was hungry, yet you might not be, and still—"

"Still what?"

"That if I send for a large pie you would not mind helping us eat it."

"I should have no objection in the world; and if so be you want a pie fetched, why just fork over the chink, and you shall have one in five minutes."

"The chink? What do you mean by chink, good sir?"

"Why, how jolly green you must be. Chink means money, and money means chink."

"Oh I see," said Dick, with that vacant kind of smile, which one often notices upon the faces of the aged.

As he spoke he took from his pocket a small leather bag.

He undid the string with which it was fastened, and pulled out half-a-guinea.

"Take this, kind sir, and buy a pie. A large one, and you can buy yourself another drop of gin with the change, if you will be good enough to do so, kind sir."

"Oh, won't I, that's all!"

"You will?"

"Rather. Do you know I looks upon you as one of the right John Bull sort."

"I am glad," said Dick, in his humblest tones, "that I have found favour with you, good sir."

"All right. Here, Hilton! Hilton!"

"Who's Hilton, excellent sir?"

"A man that runs of errands. Oh, here he comes."

An old, white-haired man, in a threadbare suit of rusty black, came at a shuffling trot along the passages.

"Here, Hilton," said Winch, as he approached. "Go over to Coles, and fetch a large meat pie. Would you like mutton or pork?" he added, turning to Dick.

This was an unlooked for chance of saying what he wished, so Dick availed himself of it instantly.

"I should, if it is agreeable to you, like to have a mutton pie, and slack baked."

"Slack what?"

"Oh! I know what he means," said Hilton.

"What?"

"Not baked too brown."

"That's just it."

"Very well, then, you shall have just what you like, old file. A large mutton pie and slack baked from Coles, and a pint of the best Old Tom from Allen's, at the corner."

"All right," said Hilton. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

Rejoiced beyond measure at the success of his stratagem, and not doubting for a moment that Coles would send the pie with the saws in it, Dick entered his old friend's cell.

By the expression on Tom's face, he could tell he had overheard every word of the dialogue between himself and Winch, as he contented himself with simply smiling and nodding his head.

As before, he took his seat at Tom's side.

In a few moments Winch came into the cell, carrying a monstrous pie, sufficient for half-a-dozen people to dine off.

The turnkey little thought how anxious a glance the seeming old farmer bestowed upon the pie, nor the delight which tumulted in his breast when he saw the top was quite pale, and that two of the little spiral ornaments on the top were placed so as to touch each other.

Winch deposited the gigantic pie upon the bed, since that was the only thing in the place that would at all serve for a table.

Then he ran back to the door and returned with three plates, knives and forks, and the pint bottle of gin.

"How very good of you, sir," said Dick "to have so much consideration for my misguided son. Surely you will have some recompense for your generous action."

As he spoke, Dick took up his knife and fork.

"Will you allow me to cut the pie, or will you, my dear sir?"

"Please yourself."

"Then I think I will," said Dick with the same silly smile. "They always expect me to do so at home."

"I daresay."

Dick cut a large piece out of the pie and placed it on the turnkey's plate.

His hand shook a little when he made the next cut, and handed Tom the piece of crust on which was the two ornaments.

Then he placed some on his own plate, and all three fell to eating as though they had fasted for a month.

Winch managed to get through his lot first, and while he was holding up for a second supply, he noticed Tom upset his plate.

Winch just noticed the circumstance, but all he did was to laugh.

He did not notice that Tom had left a tidy-size piece of crust on the bed, and that he immediately covered it up with the skirt of his coat.

Their aim was at last safely and successfully accomplished.

The hearty meal they made was washed down with gin, and all three were on the best of terms with themselves and each other.

At last Dick rose to go.

"Good-bye, my poor boy," he said. "I hope if you are spared you will see the error of your ways."

"And so do I," said Winch, "for you are both jolly good sorts."

Dick shook hands warmly with Tom King, and then followed Winch out of the dungeon.

The ponderous door was closed and locked.

Then, talking together like old friends, Turpin still preserving his deferential manner, they reached the lobby. Here a rather unexpected sight met Dick's gaze.

There were four persons present.

One was the man "on the lock."

Mr. Tapner, the governor.

The Reverend Mr. Colley, the ordinary.

The fourth was a shrewd, sharp featured man, who was a perfect stranger to Dick, though rather a celebrated character.

Somehow, as Dick's glance fell upon these persons, a conviction sprang up in his mind that something was wrong—that the assemblage boded no good to him.

The eager, earnest gaze which all four fixed upon him served to confirm him in this idea.

He had much ado to maintain his composure.

But he did so with a great effort.

Assuming as unconcerned an air as he possibly could, Dick, still continuing his conversation with Winch, made his way towards the gate.

But when he was about in the centre of the lobby the man with the shrewd face stepped forward.

"One moment, sir, if you please; I have a word to say to you."

Dick had no resource but to come to a stand, which he did with a knowledge that he was discovered.

"Sorry to trouble you," said Tapner, the governor, advancing a step or two, "but as we heard it rumoured that it was very probable that Dick Turpin would seek to obtain an interview with his accomplice, I sent for Mr. Townshend, the Bow-street runner, to examine anyone who visited the prisoner, with a view to ascertaining whether they were really what they seemed.

There was so much meaning in the way this speech was uttered that Turpin felt sure his identity was more than half suspected.

The name of the celebrated police-officer was well-known to Turpin, though his person was not, and he was confident that anything like an observation would show that he was disguised.

As for Winch, he positively stared aghast.

"Come, sir," said Townshend, as he put his hand upon Dick's shoulder, "you have heard what Mr. Tapner has said, and of course you cannot make any objection to our ascertaining that you are really the father of the notorious highwayman, Tom King!"

CHAPTER CXVI.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A COWARDLY ATTACK MADE UPON THEM BY THE BOAT'S CREW.

MOST reluctantly indeed do we leave Dick Turpin in a situation of so much peril, but it becomes absolutely necessary to the proper development of our story that we should do so, and introduce to the reader two fresh characters, in whom we hope they will feel as great an interest as they do in those with whom they are already acquainted.

The names of these two characters are well known, and familiar to the eyes and ears of all.

Jack Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack. Claude Duval.

These are the two characters.

The Claude Duval of whom we are about to speak was not the one who came to an ignominious end in the reign of the second Charles, but his nephew.

The two have often been ignorantly confounded.

It will be recollected that when Tom King related his history he, towards the latter portion of it, informed Dick Turpin of the very singular way in which he made the acquaintance of Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, and how, after committing several depredations in their society, he had assisted them both to leave England.

They had managed to carry off with them a rather large amount of money, so that when they got over to Paris they were able to live in the first of style.

For a considerable period the total change in their mode of life had a pleasant and delightful effect, but after the lapse of a few months they began to long to revisit England.

This feeling, when it once took root in their breasts, grew rapidly, and the desire increased until they could go no longer without gratifying it.

Accordingly, on the evening of the very day on which Tom King was taken to Newgate, the two ex-highwaymen, having converted everything valuable which they possessed into money, set out from Paris to Boulogne-sur-Mer.

This place they reached in safety, and without the occurrence of any incident worthy of recordation.

It was, however, close upon sunset when they arrived, for in those days the rapid mode of transit we now enjoy did not exist.

Had it not been for their treasure, which amounted to several thousands of pounds in gold, and which they had bestowed in a shabby-looking leather portmanteau, they would have performed the journey on horseback. As it was it necessitated the hiring of some kind of wheeled conveyance.

They selected a post-chaise.

In a vehicle of this description, for all the world knows what post-stages were in France a hundred and fifty years ago, they traversed the terribly dull, barren, and uninteresting piece of ground between Paris and Boulogne.

"Thank goodness," said Jack, as he opened the door and stepped out, "that that's over, and I sincerely hope that I may never have to sit inside another infernal machine like this."

"And so say I," said Claude. "Here, take hold of the portmanteau."

As he spoke, he handed the article named to Sixteen-String Jack, and then alighted.

"I suppose," said Jack, "that the best thing we can do will be to stop here a little while, and make a good meal."

"Oh! by all means."

"We shall then be ready to cross over about dark, as we had arranged."

"Just so. The only thing is shall we be able to hire a boat?"

"That is just the question."

"I should think we ought."

"Oh! decidedly."

"It would never do for us to go by the ordinary packet."

"It would not be over safe, for while on board we might be recognised by somebody or other, which would be exceedingly disagreeable."

"You're right, it would. No, it won't do to go by the packet, Jack."

"That's my opinion. Now I think for money we shall be easily enough able to hire a boat that will take us over in double quick time."

By this time the waiters from the hotel before which they had drawn up, came swarming round them, and made desperate efforts to carry off, not only the portmanteau, but themselves as well.

"Hands off! Hands off!" said Claude and Jack together. "Hands off! We will carry it ourselves."

"Non—non—non," they replied.

"Lead the way, and we will follow," cried Jack, and he saluted one of the waiters with his foot in the hinder portion of his anatomy.

This had the desired effect, and in a minute or two more our friends were seated at table with the portmanteau between them.

A wretched repast, to their English notions, was set before them, and then Claude took an opportunity to speak to the waiter who placed it on the table relative to the possibility of their obtaining a vessel that evening that would take them across the Channel to Dover.

"Impossible, *messieurs*," replied the waiter. "You have here the very best of accommodation."

"I know that," said Jack, "but go we must; and if you can find a boat you shall have five francs for your pains."

"Five francs! Oh, *milord*, I am your very humble servant."

"Then it is no longer impossible?"

"Non, *milord*. This is the grand nation where everything is possible."

"If you pay for it."

"Precisely, *milord*. I go away to make the enquiries, *messieurs*."

"That's the style," said Claude. "I'll warrant he finds a boat for five francs. I'll be hanged, though, if I care about this fare. Thank goodness, this is the last time we shall have to put up with it."

"And the wine," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he put down the glass which he had just carried to his lips, and making a wry face as he did so, "is most damnable."

"Then I won't try it," said Claude, laughing.

In a few moments more the waiter returned.

"Have you found a boat?" queried Sixteen-String Jack, eagerly.

"I have, *milord*."

"That will take us across?"

"Oh! yes."

"What sort of a craft is it?" asked Claude Duval, dubiously.

"Oh! *magnifique*. When you are ready, *milords*, we will go down to the beach."

"We are quite ready and waiting," exclaimed the two friends in one voice. "Lead on."

"The bill, milord."

"Oh! yes; I had forgotten. How much is it?"

"Ten francs, milord."

"The devil it is, never mind! here is a Louis, you can keep the change for finding a boat."

"A million thanks, milord. This is the way. Shall I carry your portmanteau?"

"No, thank you," said Claude, who lifted it on to his shoulders without difficulty. "We prefer carrying it ourselves."

"As you will, messieurs. Follow me."

This they were not long in doing.

As they expected, it was quite dark.

The distance between the hotel and the sea beach was inconsiderable, so it was soon passed over.

Short as it was, however, it enabled the two friends to get accustomed to the obscurity, and when they reached the shore they saw in the distance a fair-sized lugger, while just at their feet was a boat to carry them on board.

"This is the captain of the ship," said the waiter, as a man stepped out of the boat and came towards them.

"Servant, sir," he said. "You want to cross the channel, I believe?"

"We do," said Jack, "what shall you charge to take us across?"

"It is a rough night, messieurs, and will be rougher."

CHAPTER XCVII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY IN GETTING TO ENGLAND.

At this intimation from the captain of the lugger the two friends instantly gave a keen look about them.

A large number of small dark clouds dotted the sky.

A fresh breeze came every now and then in short and fitful gusts, which caused the clouds to scud across the heavens at a prodigious rate.

"I am afraid so," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he observed these signs of squally weather, "but nevertheless we must cross over to-night."

"I am ready, messieurs. My boat is strong, and the men good sailors."

"Then there is not much to fear. What shall you charge?"

"I cannot do it for less than one hundred francs (£4), messieurs."

"I suppose not," said Jack; "take us over safely, and you shall have a hundred and fifty."

"It shall be done, messieurs. Will it please you to step on board?"

"Yes, for we want as little delay as possible."

As they spoke the two highwaymen walked quite down to the water's edge, and stepped into the boat.

Jack entered first, and then held out his hands to Claude for the portmanteau.

"Allow me, messieurs," said the captain, quickly.

"Don't trouble, thank you," replied Claude, drawing back, "I will give it him."

The captain looked rather surprised, and well he might, but he came to a tolerably correct conclusion on the subject.

And that was, that the old leather concern carried some very valuable article indeed; something too valuable to be trusted out of the owners' hands.

However, he made no remark, but entered the boat after them, and then gave the word for the men to push off.

The order was obeyed with true nautical alacrity, and the little skiff—for it was nothing more—was soon alongside the lugger.

The two friends observed the same caution with their precious burden, and reached the deck of the vessel with it in perfect safety.

For a few moments a scene of great bustle and apparent confusion ensued, consequent upon getting the vessel under weigh, but when this was done all appearance of disorder vanished.

The highwaymen declined to go below, but, observing a

pile of cordage and canvas on the deck, sat down near it with the portmanteau behind them.

Some ship's lanterns, which were hung to different portions of the rigging, shed a dim and crepuscular kind of light upon the deck.

By their aid Jack and Claude saw for the first time the countenance of the captain, and it did not prepossess them in his favour.

Both were, in consequence of their wide experience, capital physiognomists, and in all probability, had they seen the captain's face before they came on board, they would have declined his services, so sinister and treacherous was it.

A family likeness could be traced in the features of the rest of the crew.

It was in rather an anxious tone of voice that Sixteen-String Jack addressed his comrade Claude Duval.

"Claude," he said, in a whisper, for he was fearful of being overheard, "Claude."

"Yes, Jack."

"Speak low. Did you notice the captain's face?"

"I did."

"And what do you think of him?"

"Well, I may be mistaken, but I think he looks more like a wolf than a lamb."

"You may depend he is no good."

"Was that your idea when you looked at him?"

"It was."

"So it was mine."

"That is rather strange, but still it only serves to confirm me in the idea that I am right."

"What do you suspect?"

"Oh! not anything in particular. But have you noticed the rest of the crew?"

"No, they appear like shadows in this faint light."

"Well, don't seem to do so, but just take a good look at that chap there standing near the bulwarks."

"I see him."

"And what do you think of?"

"Why, that he looks one of the greatest villains unhung."

"And you may depend he is, too. Such a man as that would be capable of any atrocity."

"Look, Jack, there is another of them about half a dozen steps further aft. The lantern is shining on his face. I'll be hanged if he don't look a more diabolical character than the other."

"He does. You may make up your mind we have got into nice company."

"That's pretty clear."

"And the sooner we get out of it the better."

"So say I, but unfortunately it can't be done until we reach our journey's end."

"Unfortunately, yes."

"All we can do is to keep a sharp look out about us."

"That's it. But I say, Claude."

"What, Jack."

"It strikes me very forcibly that if they had any idea of what we carry in that portmanteau behind us, they would try their best to get possession of it."

"Oh! don't suggest such a thing. We should be in a nice fix if they were."

"We just should."

"Why, how many of them are there?"

"I can hardly tell. I have seen half-a-dozen at least."

"Have you, by Jove."

"I have indeed, and the probability is that there are half-a-dozen more in different parts of the ship that we have not seen."

"Likely enough."

"So that twelve to two would be rather long odds."

"A little too long, I should think, but let us hope that our suspicions are groundless."

"I sincerely trust they are. Confound the sea, and I'll say it, I say. Give me the road."

"And me. Do you remember that young chap that was with us, and helped us off?"

"What, Tom King?"

"Yes."

"What made you think of him?"

"I can hardly tell. Happening to speak about a road, I suppose."

"What about him?"



[TURPIN TELLING ELLEN AND DAVIS THAT TOM KING IS A PRISONER IN NEWGATE.]

"Oh! I was just wondering whether he was still at the business, and how he got on, and such like."

"We shall know pretty soon, I hope. He was a brave chap."

"You are right enough there. It will be a sad pity if ever he comes to grief."

"It will indeed."

"Perhaps we shall meet him when we land."

"Likely enough."

Poor Tom! The speakers little thought that at that very hour he was an inmate of the prison of Newgate.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN ACHIEVE A BARREN VICTORY. The state of affairs on board the little vessel was rather peculiar, and especially dangerous to our friends.

As the last words passed their lips, a dark, lithesome figure crawled away from the bulk of cordage on which they were sitting, and in a strange, gliding, ophidian

sort of fashion, made its way to where the captain was standing.

This dark and half-defined figure now rose to its full height, and showed that it was a boy of about fifteen years of age.

An aspect of low, ferocious cunning was on his face.

"Well, Jacob," said the captain, in a low voice, as soon as he approached, "have you heard anything?"

"Lots, but not much of any importance."

"Ha! they are cautious."

"They are, and something more."

"What?"

"Suspicious."

"Indeed. We must be cautious."

"You must indeed, for, from what I have heard, they are not men to be easily overcome or taken by surprise."

"But the portmanteau?"

"It is behind them as they sit, and so placed that it would be impossible to remove it without their knowledge."

"Confound them! But the contents, Jacob—the contents!"

"They are of great value. But whether gold or jewels is more than I can tell."

"The captain's eyes glistened with cupidity.

"Gold or jewels?"

"Yes, I am almost sure it contains either one or the other."

"Very good, then they shall be ours. Jacob!"

"Yes, sir."

"Go round to every one of the crew, and tell them to be armed in readiness for the signal."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"And when it is given, to pounce on the two men and either slay them or make them prisoners according as things turn out."

The boy Jacob, in the same snake-like fashion which had formerly characterized him, glided away, and one after another made the crew acquainted with the captain's orders.

It was well for our friends that they were so far prepared as they were.

They still continued their conversation, which turned chiefly upon old exploits.

They were somewhere about mid-channel.

As the reader suspects, the crew of this vessel were pirates: not bold, hardy men who contested bravely and fearlessly for what they got, but mean, sneaking hounds, who were ever ready to take an advantage of those who happened to fall into their hands.

Little did Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack think that they owed their lives so far to the position which they had taken up.

But so it was.

As they sat it was a matter of impossibility for any one to get behind them.

Had not such been the case, the assassin's dagger would long before have drank their hearts' blood.

But presently something came under Jack's notice that made him stop short in what he was saying.

"Be on your guard," he said, in a low tone. "Look before you."

In obedience to his friend's hurried command, Claude carried his hands to the butts of his pistols, so that they could be brought into immediate requisition, and looked before him.

Just separable from the rigging and the shadows which it cast he could see several dark forms.

They were the crew of the boat crawling stealthily to attack them.

Claude in a moment comprehended the danger, and cried, in startling tones—

"Up, and defend yourself, Jack, or you are a dead man!"

As he spoke, he himself sprung to his feet, and holding a pistol in his left hand, drew his heavy sword from its scabbard, and waved it with great swiftness around him.

"Confusion!" cried a voice, which the highwaymen immediately recognized as the captain's. "Confusion! We are discovered. Upon them, my brave hearts!"

A guttural kind of yell burst from the throats of the men, and they precipitated themselves upon Jack and Claude.

But they quickly found they had got no children to contend with, and after the first onslaught they drew back from the terrific sweeps Claude made with his sword with something like panic and dismay stamped upon their faces.

Two of their number already lay bleeding on the deck, while several were severely wounded.

In repelling the attack, Claude and Jack placed themselves in a position best suited to the purpose.

Back to back.

That was the position.

Only for a space of time of a second's duration did the ship's crew retreat; then, animated by the words of the captain, they rushed forward with redoubled fury.

It was almost more than our friends could do to keep off so many foes, but they managed with infinite skill to do so.

The sharp reports of the pistols, the clashing of swords, the cries of the combatants, and the groans of the wounded and dying, made up a chorus of sounds that would have befitted Pandemonium.

It was with a feeling of the greatest rage that both

the highwaymen fought, but yet they were careful not to let it blind their caution.

From the first they had gained a slight advantage, and both knew to the full the importance of maintaining it, and that, if once lost, it could never be regained.

A combat, such as the one we describe, must of necessity endure but a few moments.

More than one-half of the crew lay helpless or dead upon the deck, and then the remainder cast away their weapons, fell upon their knees, and sued for quarter.

This was granted them on the condition that they moved not an inch from where they then were, until it was decided what should be done with them.

This they, with one voice, promised to do, but our friends nevertheless kept a sharp eye upon them.

Jack and Claude had both received several severe wounds during the contest, and to these they gave their first and immediate attention.

"It was a close touch for both of us," said the former, as he tied a bandage round his comrade's arm, "but we have got out of it pretty well."

"Yes, but what are we to do with these prisoners?"

"There, I confess, you puzzle me."

"Are they to be trusted, think you?"

"Not so far as you can see them."

"That is decisive, then."

"What are you going to do?"

"I propose that we make them all get into the boat that brought us on board, and then cut it adrift."

"Agreed; it shall be done."

"Then, raising his voice, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"Your lives are spared on condition that you at once betake yourselves to the boat, and cast off."

"Mercy, mercy! good sirs, we shall be lost."

"And a good loss, too. Which will you do; you can take your choice. Get into the boat, or stay here and be shot?"

"The boat—the boat," they cried.

"Be still. Rise one of you at a time and do so."

Muttering inaudible maledictions, the fellows rose and did their bidding.

They were rank cowards, or they would have made another attempt to conquer their foes.

It was, perhaps, as well that they got into the boat as quietly as they did.

As soon as the last had entered the frail bark, Claude cut the rope, and they drifted away in the darkness in a moment.

The sea, our friends found, and very much to their consternation, was in a state of great agitation, as though a storm was at hand.

The crests of the billows were quite white, and a thick foam floated on the surface of the water.

They strained their eyes after the boat, but it was invisible.

"We have done a foolish thing," said Jack.

"That was precisely my thought when we spoke."

"We are going to have a storm, and we should have kept some of those men on board to manage the boat. As for myself I am, as I may say, quite a novice in nautical matters."

"Never mind, we must do the best we can, and trust to providence for the result."

"Ha! ha!" said a voice.

The laugh was screeching and unearthly.

The suddenness with which it came, and the abruptness with which it ceased, made the blood rush with a sickening sensation round their hearts.

"Ha! ha!" said the voice again.

Quick as lightning Jack turned in the direction whence the hideous sound proceeded, and there saw, standing on the bulwarks, the figure of a man.

"Ha! ha!" said the man, on perceiving he was observed. "Ha! ha!"

"Who can it be?" asked Duval, anxiously.

"The captain."

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE CAPTAIN COMES TO A BAD END, AND SO DOES HIS BOAT.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK'S assertion was perfectly correct.

It was the captain, who stood upon the bulwarks.

It was the captain who had articulated that discordant laugh.

But what was his object for behaving thus they could not conceive.

Almost at the commencement of the encounter Jack had given him a frightful wound with his sword, which he fully believed was a mortal one.

But in this, it would seem, he had made a mistake.

"Come down," said Jack, "and on condition of your steering the vessel safely, we will not only spare your life, but give you a reward as well."

"Ha! ha!"

"What in the world does he find to laugh at?"

"That's just what I should like to know," replied Claude.

"Perhaps this will aid us a little."

As he spoke, he stooped and picked off the deck one of the ship's lanterns, which during the affray had been disengaged from its position.

It was, however, uninjured, and the light within burning steadily, so that when Claude held it above his head he was able to diffuse a tolerable amount of illumination about him.

The figure of the captain became more plainly revealed.

"Ha! ha!" he said.

"Look, look!" cried Claude, "what is it he holds in his arms?"

Jack strained his vision to the utmost.

"It is the treasure," he said. "He has got the treasure."

"Ha! ha!" screamed the captain, in a yet louder tone of voice, "I am even with you now, and shall die revenged."

As he uttered the word revenged he, in spite of its greatness, swung the portmanteau in the air.

It was evident he had so far recovered from the blow he had received as to be able to make his way to where the portmanteau containing the whole worldly wealth of the two friends was deposited, and then feeling that his hours, nay, minutes, were numbered, had determined to die revenged.

"Drop that," said Jack, sharply, and running forward.

But he only precipitated matters.

Uttering a loud and fearful yell, which sounded dismally above the moaning of the wind, the captain clutched the portmanteau to his breast, and sprang over the ship's side into the sea.

Claude and Jack rushed to the bulwark and peered over, but though the former waved the lantern in every direction, not a trace of the captain could be seen, and of necessity of their treasure also.

They looked rather blankly at each other.

"Gone," said Jack, at length.

"Clean," added his comrade.

Then they looked once more over the ship's side.

"Curse the captain and ship, crew and all! That rascally waster to put us into such hands. But I'll be even with him, if I have to make a journey to France on purpose."

"What's done can't be helped," said Claude, who was of a more philosophic turn of mind. "Altogether I think we have made a nice mess of it. Just look at the waves and the ship—what do you call it—yaws about every where. It's very odd to me if we don't rejoin our treasure now."

These words recalled Jack to a contemplation of the state of things around him, and of a surety what he saw was anything but assuring.

"We're in for it this time, that's certain. There'll be a terrific storm, and—good heavens! what's that?"

A tremendous report like the discharge of a cannon saluted their ears, and forced this ejaculation from his lips, and then the next moment a mass of something fell bodily upon the deck and partly into the water, causing the vessel to lean frightfully on one side, so much that one part of the deck was quite under water.

By a great effort the two friends managed to keep their feet.

"The topmast," cried Claude. "The topmast has gone. We must cut the ship clear, or she will sink at once."

He sprang forward as he spoke, and with his sword commenced cutting through the complicated mass of sails and ropes.

It was a tedious job, but Jack assisted him, and, as their weapons were keen, they soon managed to cut it

through, and then with a great splash the whole fell into the sea.

The ship, as a natural result, quickly righted herself, but by this time the threatening tempest fairly commenced.

The wind howled and shrieked, and every now and then the waves would splash on to the deck.

The darkness rapidly increased, so that in a few minutes our friends were unable to see each other, and as for bearing that was quite out of the question, unless he happened to have his mouth in his ear.

Their position was about as perilous as one as could well be imagined.

Totally ignorant of nautical matters.

Totally ignorant of their whereabouts.

What hope of surmounting the fury of the elements could they have?

Very little, if any at all.

It so happened that the vessel belonging to the rascally captain was well and strongly built, and no doubt, under proper management, would have come out of such a storm unscathed, but left entirely to the mercy of the winds and waves, it seemed little short of an impossibility that she would escape.

On the contrary, there was every reason to think that she would drift upon some rock and then go to pieces.

A sudden lull came.

It is by no means an unusual thing for such to be the case, but when it does it is a sure prognostic that it is only the tempest collecting its scattered energies for a stronger and more furious effort.

But it gave Jack an opportunity to speak.

"Claude, Claude!" he said. "Are you safe?"

"Quite. And you?"

"All right at present. Surely this is our last escape. The tempest will burst forth again with ten-fold fury, and then, I fear, down we shall go."

"How far are we from land?"

"I have not the remotest idea. But, Claude!"

"Yes, Jack."

"Find a piece of rope and lash yourself tightly to a spar now you have a chance."

"I will. You, of course, will do the same?"

"Assuredly."

"Have you a rope, my friend?"

"Yes."

"So have I."

"Make haste, then, and lash yourself, you will be too late. I expect the return every instant."

"Leave me to myself. There, all is right now."

"You are sure you are secure?"

"Yes."

"Then we have done all that is in our power to do to save our lives. The rest we must leave in the hands of Providence."

"I fear there is no help for it?"

"There is not."

"Confound the captain, then, and all the whole lot."

"I cry amen, with all my heart."

"It certainly is not just the death I should have chosen, but I suppose we must put up with it. Ha! here it comes again. Good bye, old fellow."

"Oh, don't despair. I shan't say good bye. We—"

A gust of wind, of most tremendous force, came at this moment, and cut him short in what he was about to say.

Well was it they had taken the precaution they had, or without a doubt they would have been swept into the boiling sea, the froth upon the surface of which, glistened faintly through the darkness.

And then to add to their discomfiture a gigantic wave broke over the vessel, drenching them in a moment from head to foot.

CHAPTER C.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN REACH THE LAND IN SAFETY.

THE rudderless ship plunged madly onwards.

Sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, scudding swiftly along, sometimes in a straight line, sometimes to the east, sometimes to the west.

But so pitch dark was it that the two highwaymen were not aware of these vagaries in her course.

An anxious hour passed.

Sixty minutes, every one of which they fully expected to be their last in life.

And all this time the storm continued with unabating violence.

The two friends had secured themselves to a large balk of wood, which they knew, in the event of the vessel going down under their feet, would float easily.

About six feet apart, one being at one end and one at the other, so that they should not, come what would, be separated.

They felt a consciousness that they had done all in their power for their own preservation, and calmly awaited the result.

Although the space between them was so inconsiderable, yet they were unable, even by shouting at the top of their voices, to make themselves heard.

But when that hour had passed the hurricane began to diminish.

A faint gray light appeared in the sky to the right or them.

It was the dawn of the coming day.

Right glad were they to see this sign, not only because it foretold the cessation of the storm, but because it enabled them to form some idea of their precise position.

The spume upon the seething waves gradually disappeared.

They no longer tossed and tumbled as they did.

In fact, it seemed that as the light in the eastern sky increased in brightness so did the storm decrease.

At last land came in sight.

Dim, shadowy, and indistinct it looked, but still land it was.

It was dead ahead.

"Can you swim, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, at length, when he found his voice could be heard.

"A little."

"I can swim well, though I have not practised lately. I think the best thing we can do now there is no fear of our being washed overboard will be to cut ourselves loose again, and so be prepared for any emergency that may arise."

"I think so too, and I shall be very glad to do as you suggest, for my limbs are so cramped with the cold and wet, and being so long in the same position, that I have scarcely any use left."

"That you will soon get the better of my friend," said Jack, as with his sword he severed his bonds; "you will only have to move about a little."

Claude quickly followed his example, and though at first he kept his feet with difficulty, yet in a little while he found himself all right.

Their first and most natural impulse was to go forward, and endeavour to make out their position.

"Have you any idea whereabouts we are?" asked Claude of Jack, who had taken a long and careful look around him.

"Not the least, and yet?"—

"Yet what?"

"It seems impossible that we can have come so far; but still that place yonder looks like the North Foreland."

"It does," said Claude, looking in the direction Jack indicated. "And it is the North Foreland too," he added, after a few minutes observation.

"If it is, then all will be well."

"It is very fortunate the storm abated when it did, or otherwise we should have been dashed to pieces upon those rocks."

"It was what I expected every moment. Still, I do not think we are in any great danger now. Plenty of fishermen live upon the beach, and as soon as they see a vessel so dismantled as this is, and going entirely at the discretion of the winds and waves, they will put off in their boats and take us ashore."

"Let us hope so."

"I think we may reasonably indulge in such a hope, and then a day's rest, and we are ready for the road."

"Not quite," said Claude.

"Why not?"

"Don't you forget that the confounded captain carried off our wealth. How are we to buy horses and new clothes too, for when these have been dried which we have on they will not be good for much."

"That's true," said Jack, as he stroked his chin. "an- commonly true."

"We can't go upon the road without equipments."

"No."

"What shall we do then?"

"I'll tell you."

"What?"

"Pad it!"

"No. That won't do. I don't like the idea."

"How vexations it is, though probably we ourselves are most to blame."

"How so?"

"By being over-solicitous about the portmanteau. You may depend it was that circumstance alone that raised the captain's suspicions."

"Like enough. But then it is only natural one should be careful in such a case."

"True! But, however, its no good grumbling about what's done and can't be helped. I only hope we shall soon see some of the fishermen's boats you spoke of."

"Then you have your wish, for look, I can see no less than three putting off."

"So they are. Wave your hat or your handkerchief, or something of that sort, to let them know we are in distress."

The fishermen quickly perceived these signals of our friends, and rowed forward with still greater speed.

The distance to the shore seemed insignificant, but it took the boats a long time to reach them.

At last, however, they came alongside.

A few words served to make them aware of the state of affairs, and they resolved to tow the lugger into the harbour.

In pursuance of this determination, a rope was attached and the vessel drawn as far towards the land as it would come.

By the time this was done it was broad daylight, and the sun shed his warm beams upon the now placid sea, which gave not the slightest token of the storm.

The whole of the crew of the boat who had been left upon the deck had been washed overboard, except one, who only escaped his companions' fate by having been jammed into a corner.

He was quite dead, of course.

Still this was sufficient confirmation of the truth of their story.

The fishermen all offered to find the two highwaymen with a shelter, and they gladly enough accepted the offer of one of them.

Our friends were not entirely penniless, in fact, between them they had somewhere about twelve pounds, and with some of this money they were able to get a tolerable meal.

After this they resolved to seek that repose of which they stood so much in need.

The bed upon which they were to rest was a hard one, but, despite of that, it was inviting enough to them, and it was not long after they threw themselves upon it before they were sound and fast asleep.

It was not possible for human beings to undergo what they had undergone without being thoroughly exhausted; indeed, it is questionable whether many could have been found who would have held out so long as they did.

But they were rather exceptional beings. The peculiar kind of life they had for so long led hardened their constitutions, and made them almost insensible of fatigue.

CHAPTER CL.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE A RATHER EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY.

THE day was almost gone when Sixteen-String Jack, after several uneasy movements, awoke.

He started up at once, and hastening to the little window in the apartment, looked out.

Remote objects—for the window looked landward—were indistinct, and those, at even a short distance only, imperfectly defined.

Night was coming rapidly. In half an hour it would be quite dark.

Claude was still sleeping soundly, but Jack, thinking

that the time for action had arrived, placed his hand upon him, and awoke him.

"Up, Claude," he said. "Up, and be stirring. It will soon be night."

"What shall we do?"

"That, when you are thoroughly aroused, is a question we must carefully discuss."

"Begin at once," said Claude, springing up, thoroughly awake, "begin at once."

"About these fishermen."

"Well, what about them?"

"You see, people are so cursedly officious. Now this boat too, you'll see, they won't let rest as they might, but make no end of inquiries and bother about it."

"They will, you may rest assured of that."

"Very well, I don't want any more than you do to be mixed up in anything of that sort directly we set our feet on the shore. It wouldn't be at all pleasant."

"And certainly not at all safe. I tell you what it is, we must give them the slip."

"So I think."

"This window is not far from the ground; now I think we might easily be able to drop it."

"Oh! of course; and then off we go, and they can settle their affairs in the best way they can."

"Exactly."

"Let us set about it at once, for who knows how soon they may be coming upstairs after us?"

"It is plenty dark enough, I think, to make our departure unobserved."

"Plenty; and besides, they are likely enough busy about their daily avocations, and would not notice us."

"They would not expect we were going to elope, and they will be rather astonished when they find the place empty."

"Ha! ha! They will. Now, how are we to get down?"

As he spoke, Jack unfastened the little latticed casement, and opened it.

"The place is little better than a hut," replied Claude. We ought only to require our hands and arms to aid us in our descent."

"You are right, that is all we shall require," said Sixteen-String Jack, who had estimated the depth to the ground with his eye.

"Come on, then. Let me drop first."

But Jack had already lowered himself from the window.

He hung for a moment by his hands, in order to steady himself, and then let go.

He alighted upon the little patch of garden at the back of the cottage, so that he made no sound that would be sufficient to give an alarm.

He was very quickly joined by Claude, who said—

"Now, Jack, I think the best thing we can do is to push on towards London, as we at first arranged."

"Hang it, yes. We thought of having cash enough to lead a merry life there for some time to come, but that confounded captain balked us out of that intention."

"Ah! well! it is never worth while to grieve over spilt milk. We must set to work and get some more."

"I suppose we must; but come, climb over these palings, and let us betake ourselves to the high road, or we shall be discovered."

"Right!" was the reply, and then they scrambled hastily over the palisade that bounded the little garden, and, after crossing a field or two, they came to the high road.

To all appearance nothing was in sight or hearing, so they opened a gate, and passed through it without hesitation.

"Now, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack. "There is clearly no resource but to begin business afresh."

"So I think; but we are very ill provided with the necessaries."

"We are; but we must do the best we can. Our safest course just at present will be to place as great a distance as we can between the place we have just left and ourselves."

"Indubitably."

"Forward, then."

For some time nothing further was said, but both set forward at a walk that was almost a trot.

It was a pace, however, which they could not keep up

for any length of time without resting in order to recover breath.

They were a good two miles on their road, though, before they did come to a halt.

"Hark," said Jack, suddenly, as a faint sound reached his ears. "Hark!"

"Horses," said Claude.

"Yes, I can hear two. They are coming along at an easy rate, are they not?"

"They are."

"Shall we—"

"Try our hands?"

"Yes."

"With all my heart; it's a long time since we had any practice."

"It is. But what have you in the shape of weapons?"

"My sword."

"No pistols?"

"No."

"I have two, but they are disengaged and I have no means of reloading them."

"We must get the horses," said Jack; "those are what we stand in the greatest need of."

"I am afraid we shall have some trouble if they are determined men."

"Pho-pho! the more danger the better! Stand on one side here in the shadow of the hedge along with me, and when they come up let us jump suddenly upon them."

"Agreed."

The two highwaymen now took up their position, and waited with some impatience the coming of their prey.

The two approaching horsemen came along with great deliberation.

They were evidently in no great hurry.

As they drew nearer the sound of voices rose upon the air.

In the silence there was round about that place any little noise could be heard at a great distance.

"Don't mention such a thing, brother Zebedee," they heard a voice say, in oleaginous accents, "pray don't mention such a thing; you put me quite in a shiver."

"I am in a shiver myself," said a voice in reply, "and have been ever since I mounted."

"You are not accustomed to horseback riding, brother, I know, but then the steed only proceeds at a walk."

"Yes, but he don't walk steady, and he goes from side to side as though he was drunk. I never knew such a stupid beast."

"We haven't much much further to go, brother."

"Thank goodness for that, then, for I was afraid to ask the question."

"Not three miles, certainly."

But when I think of the chapel-money we carry with us, and remember that there are ungodly men called highwaymen roaming about at night, seeking whom they may devour—I mean plunder, my blood flows chill in my veins, for we, the chosen of the people, are men of peace; and besides, we are not able to defend ourselves."

"Don't talk of such things, brother Zebedee, I say. The Lord be praised I heard to-day that one of the men of Belial, of whom you spoke, has even been captured and lodged in jail."

Then let us rejoice. Is it that roaming lion, Turpin, they have taken in the tils?"

"I so; but it is comrade, as he calls himself, The King, by name."

"Stand!" said Jack, at this moment, in authoritative tones, and catching the speaker's horse by the bridle, as he spoke, "Stand! Your money or your life."

CHAPTER CII.

HE RETURNS TO MR. TOWNSHEND AND DICK TURPIN IN THE LOBBY OF NEWGATE.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped Brother Zebedee, as Claude followed the actions of Sixteen-String Jack, "we are undone."

"Quick!" cried Jack. "Hand over everything valuable you possess, and your lives are spared. Refuse, and I also your head off at a single blow."

"Mercy!"

"There is no occasion to be merciful. The money, you sious rogues."

The threat of taking away their money overcame the reluctance they felt to disgorging the money, and a tolerable-sized bag was placed in Jack's hands.

It was very weighty.

The two clergymen—for such they were, dissenting clergymen, evidently—expected that having given up the money they would be suffered to depart in peace, but in this expectation they were mentally deceived.

"Alight!" cried Claude and Jack at the same moment. "Dismount at once."

"But —"

"Do you hesitate? We shall be obliged to send you to fill your destined place with the blessed."

"No, no!" they both cried, as they rolled off their horses with the greatest precipitation.

"Why?" said Claude, with a laugh, "you ought, according to what you preach, to be most anxious to quit this wicked world."

"That's never the case with a parson, though," said Jack, as he sprang upon the back of one of the horses.

"But what are we to do?" said Zebedee, ruefully, "what are we to do?"

"Go to the devil," said Claude, who had also mounted.

Then digging their spurs into the horses' sides, they sped away with great swiftness in the direction of London, leaving the two men—the chosen of the people—disconsolate in the middle of the road.

"These are capital horses," cried Claude, a few minutes afterwards, as they slackened speed to ascend a rather steep hill, "capital horses."

"I think, altogether, the adventure was most opportune; certainly one never gave us less trouble to carry out."

"But there was a bag," said Claude; "what does it contain?"

"Money, of course."

"I suppose it does from what we overheard them say."

"But what kind of money is it? How much is there?"

"It's a deuce of a weight," replied Jack, as he took it from his pocket.

"So much the better."

"They must be half-crowns, I think."

"I wish they were sovereigns."

"Never mind, we ought to be content."

"But suppose you just open the bag to see what kind of coin it really does contain."

"With all the pleasure in life."

The mouth of the bag was very securely fastened with a thin slip of leather, and Jack was sometime before he could undo it.

By the time he had done so they had reached the summit of the hill.

The country before them was visible for many miles, and just a few degrees above the horizon was the rising moon.

The light it shed was small, yet still it was a light and served to illuminate objects.

Claude looked rather anxiously towards his friend as he dived his hand into the mouth of the bag.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Half-crowns, I think."

"Guineas, I hope."

"Coppers, by jingo!" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, as he pulled out his hand, and looked at the coins he had brought forth.

"Never! That would be too bad."

"It's fact, Claude, those smooth-tongued rascals have sold us—sold us dead as hammers."

Both looked rather blank.

A faint ray of hope sprang up in Jack's mind.

"Perhaps," he said, and he threw the handful of coppers into the road as he spoke, "perhaps they are mixed silver and copper together."

There was just a possibility that this might be the case, so he set about verifying it at once.

But no, "the chosen" had been as too many for them.

The bag contained nothing but coppers.

"Confound them!" said Jack, as soon as he had assured himself beyond all possibility of doubt that this was the case. "They have bilked us. What shall we do?"

"Ride back, of course. They can't have gone far, and you may depend they have two other bags somewhere in their possession."

"What makes you think that?"

"Why, it is evidently the proceeds of a subscription, or something of that sort."

"Yes—yes."

The gold would be sorted into one bag, the silver into another, the copper into another."

"Of course it would," said Jack, turning his horse's head round. "Come on, I'll serve them out for cheating me in that way. I thought they gave up monstrous quiet."

"So did I, but I attributed that to their cowardice."

"Especially from what they had said just before."

"Yes."

"But you may depend, Jack, the reason they gave in as they did was to get off, and so make sure of the large sum which I feel convinced they carry about with them."

"I give them credit for their cunning. It was hearing them talk that misled me."

"How so?"

"Why, when they spoke of the chapel money, I made sure when he put that heavy bag in my hand that I had got it, and so did not think it worth while to search further."

"I tell into just the same mistake."

"We ought not to grumble altogether. We have got hold of two first-rate horses."

"That's true enough. But come, after them! They are only on foot, so we shall be sure to overtake them."

"The quicker we are after them the better, then; but just reflect, we are going back to the very place we were so anxious to leave."

"Reflection be hanged! Come on. I should never know what it was to rest again if I was bilked by two parsons in this way. Come on."

The highwaymen put spurs to their steeds, and descending the hill with great rapidity, reached the spot in a few moments where they had left "the chosen."

But now not a trace of them was to be seen anywhere about the spot.

On this side the hill all was darkness, so that they could see only imperfectly about them.

Yet they were quite certain they were not where they had been left.

"Go on gently, Claude. Perhaps they have walked along the road. If so, we shall very soon overtake them."

At a more moderate speed they now continued their course, but nothing of the reverend gentlemen could they see.

This circumstance had the natural effect of whetting their desire to find them out.

"They are more cunning than I could have believed," said Jack. "Doubtless, expecting we should discover we have been put off with coppers, and that we should ride back after them they have taken the opportunity of hiding themselves somewhere."

"I wish I could find them," he replied; "but I am afraid we shall be compelled to give up the attempt. We have no idea where to look."

"No, that's the worst of it. Likely enough, they are hiding close at hand, and listening to every word we say."

"I am very loath to confess myself beaten, but this time I am afraid I must. Hark! what is that?"

The highwaymen bent forward in their saddles in an attitude of intense listening.

A strange sound came to their ears.

CHAPTER CIII.

DICK HAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM A MAD BULL IN SMITHFIELD.

THE expression upon the face of Mr. Townshend when he put his hand upon Dick's shoulder, and spoke in the manner we have recorded, was really something to see.

The governor was scarcely, if any, less pleased, and he rubbed his huge hands together with the briskness of satisfaction.

The ordinary looked on with elevated hands.

Dick Turpin well enough knew that the moment Mr. Townshend, the experienced Bow-street runner began to examine him, his disguise would be detected, and feeling this was inevitable, he adopted a bold course of action.

He was able to take in at a glance all the features of his position.

Mr. Townshend would be his most formidable opponent.

Him therefore disposed of he might stand a chance.

He acted upon this idea instantaneously.

Doubling his fist, he struck the officer full in the face with it, who certainly was quite unprepared for such an assault.

He measured his full length upon the stones in the lobby.

No one could have withstood such a crushing blow as that was.

Dick did not wait for the surprise which this sudden attack had elicited to dissipate, but, plunging his hands into the skirts of his coat, drew out a pair of pistols.

He pointed one at the governor and the chaplain.

The other to the man on the lock, who stood looking on in something like bewilderment, for he had not been told of the suspicions which his superiors entertained.

"Move, and you are dead men!" said Turpin. "I cover you both with this pistol. It is loaded with two bullets. Stand where you are, and be silent if you wish to preserve your lives."

This was said in a tone that admitted of no doubt as to its earnestness.

Then pointing the other pistol at the man on the lock, he cried—

"Open the door, or as surely as I am a living man I will blow out your brains, and open it myself."

When the man on the lock heard these words he did not hesitate a moment, but began with a haste that defeated itself to undo the fastenings of the gate.

"Quick!" roared Dick, who did not know how soon some more officials of the prison might arrive upon the scene, and render his escape impossible, "quick, I say!"

When he spoke there was only a chain to unhook from the staple, but the man was in such a state of fright that he could not do it.

Dick saw this was the case, and he sprang forward, and flung the door open himself.

Then, without taking any particular aim, or even looking behind him, he fired his pistol and dashed into the street.

It was then just one o'clock in the day, and the Old Bailey was unusually full of people—workers, for the most part, who were hastening to their mid-day meal.

When those who were nearest the prison saw a man rush out so suddenly they at once concluded it must be an escape, and uttering a loud shout they ran forward and attempted to hold him.

But one sweep of the arm that held the discharged pistol sent the foremost sprawling to the ground.

The governor appeared at the doorway, and was immediately joined by Townshend, who had sufficiently recovered from his blow to rise, though his face presented a verily crushed and bruised appearance.

"Dick Turpin!" they yelled. "Stop him! stop him! A hundred pounds reward! Stop him! An escape! An escape! The man there in the farmer's dress! A hundred pounds reward! Dick Turpin! Stop him! stop him!"

Such cries as these of course quickly brought a crowd about Dick's heels, who started off at a run that none were able to keep up with.

Along the Old Bailey and up into Newgate-street he sped, the mob of people yelling behind him, and raining every instant a fresh accession to their numbers.

Dick looked up Newgate-street and down Snow-hill, but both thoroughfares were so crowded with vehicles and pedestrians that he saw it would be madness to take either of those routes.

Giltspur-street was before him.

It was pretty clear from obstructions.

Without having slackened his pace a moment he dashed along it.

He was not long in reaching Smithfield Market when he found it was market-day, and the place crowded to suffocation.

Had he only had a few minutes' start of his pursuers, this circumstance would have advantaged him exceedingly, but they were too close behind him to make it possible to mingle with the crowd, and so elude their observation.

Besides, the drovers and buyers who were there heard the shouts of the people who were chasing Turpin, and they turned round and saw the flying man running towards them.

They immediately formed into line, and the drovers took up their goods just as they would have stood to stop some run-away animal.

Dick's heart sunk when he perceived himself thus hemmed in by his foes.

He decreased his speed, uncertain how to act.

By chance, on his right hand, he saw a narrow winding turning.

He rushed down it at once.

Where it led or whether it had any outlet he knew not, but it was the only hope of escape there was for him, and that was faint enough, goodness knows.

Should it prove, like many narrow London streets, to have an entrance but no outlet, he would be caught like a rat in a trap.

He heard the people in chase give a roar as he vanished down the opening.

But they were after him instantly.

The street down which he was now running wound round about in a most tortuous and perplexing manner.

At occasional intervals in his headlong course he saw other narrow turnings leading from it.

But into neither of these would he venture.

And now a greater peril than any that had yet menaced him presented itself.

He was besides getting exhausted and winded by the violent exertion he had been compelled to make.

The street took a turn to the right, and then after that for some two or three hundred yards went quite straight, until it terminated in the market again.

Yes, there were the old stalls, the cattle, and the throngs of people.

The lane or street, whichever it was called, for Dick had no time to look and see, led from old Smithfield Market, and after all its turnings brought you out on the opposite side.

But it was not this circumstance particularly that filled Dick's breast with dismay and despair.

Coming along the street at headlong speed was a mad bull.

Such a thing as chasing one of these infuriated animals through London streets was at that time far from an unusual occurrence, to the great danger of those passengers who might be abroad at the time.

On came this bull, which was of extraordinary size.

His head was held down close to the earth.

Fire flashed from his eyes.

Clouds of vapour from his nostrils.

He uttered a low, fierce bellowing sound, and lashed his sides furiously with his tail.

On he came at a frightful rate.

Well might Dick's heart stand still when he found himself face to face with so ferocious an animal, behind whom came just such a rabble as there did after him.

What to do Dick knew not.

But he had no time for deliberation.

The frantic animal came thundering on.

He had evidently seen Dick, and blinded by fury, looked upon him as one of his enemies.

The bellowing sound increased in loudness.

Dick's pursuers came round the corner, but when they saw the state of affairs stood still.

The street had two openings.

Both of these were now filled up by an excited crowd.

Near the centre were the two creatures chased.

One a bull.

The other a man.

Dick looked despairingly at both sides of him, but no friendly turning presented itself.

How was he to escape.

To turn and flee would but take him into the arms of his pursuers.

Was he fated to be gored to death by the mad bull?

CHAPTER CIV.

DICK FINDS A TEMPORARY REFUGE FROM HIS ASSAILANTS.

THE reader must bear in mind that from the time Dick came in sight of the bull scarce thirty seconds had elapsed, and the different things that had happened occurred simultaneously.

It is wonderful how many things can take place in a few seconds, but it requires time to relate them.

The reflections that passed through Dick's mind, though seemingly many and complex, were presented to his mind almost at the same time.

Sudden peril seems to have the effect of endowing the mind with greater powers, enabling it to trace the operations of many events at the same instant, and quite independently of each other.

There was but one way in which Dick could escape, and that presented so faint a prospect that it was scarcely deserving of the name.

The houses in this street were old-fashioned ones, with deep projecting doorways and overhanging stories.

By springing into one of these doorways, and pressing himself closely against the door itself, there was just a faint hope that he would escape the bull.

But if he succeeded in this, he would be captured by the men.

However, with the instinct of preservation from immediate danger, Dick made a dash at the nearest of these doorways, and squeezed himself in in the manner we have described.

He turned aside only just in time.

The maddened bull was bearing full down upon him.

The rapid movement which Dick made was an event for which the creature did not look, and it continued to run some yards past where he stood before it could recover the impetus it had given to itself, and came to a stand.

This it did about half-a-dozen houses off, and then, giving vent to a terrible roar of rage, he turned back again.

Upon this, the people who had been chasing Turpin advanced.

Those at the other end of the street who had been chasing the bull retreated.

Some kind of instinct seemed to tell the creature whereabouts Dick was, by whom its whole attention appeared to be occupied.

He galloped direct to the doorway.

But Dick Turpin had taken advantage of the brief space of time which it took the bull to stop himself and turn round.

He observed on the old door a massive knocker.

He used it vigorously.

The door was almost immediately opened, and panting and exhausted Dick stepped in and closed the door behind him.

It was the maid-of-all-work, apparently, who had answered the knock, and she was not a little astonished at Dick's behaviour.

But her astonishment merged into terror when she saw him, with great rapidity, turn the key in the lock, and shoot the bolts at the top and bottom of the door into their sockets.

So quickly was this done, that she had not time to cry out, run away, or give any alarm, before Dick caught her by the arm.

"Make but the least sound, raise but the least alarm, and you are a corpse!"

There was a faint light over the door which served to light up the passage, and by its aid Turpin saw the girl open and shut her mouth, very much in the way some great fish might be supposed to do on being suddenly transported from its native element into the air.

"Silence," whispered Dick, in resolute tones. "Strive not to recover your voice, or—"

A dull thump at this moment came against the door.

"The bull!" said Turpin.

The thump was followed by the trampling of many footsteps, and then a hoarse cry arose.

Something of an unusual character was going on in the street.

"What's that?" gasped the servant, faintly.

"Satan and his imp after a sinning soul."

"Oh! Heaven have mercy on me," said the servant, faintly.

"Show me the way to the top of the house," cried Turpin, as he heard a furious hammering at the door. "Quick—quick for your life!"

But the events which had just occurred were too startling for the servant's mind to bear, and she fell backwards in a fainting fit.

"Confound her!" said Turpin, rushing along the passage.

A flight of stairs, leading to the upper part of the house, was before him.

He heard a voice crying out from the lower regions.

It was a feminine one.

"Sally! Sally! What is it? Shut the door, and come down stairs. Sally! Sally! I say!"

But Sally was deaf to all such calls.

Dick sprang up the staircase.

It was a very dark one, and he more than once in his headlong ascent missed his footing.

"What's the matter?" cried another voice, which proceeded from the front room on the second floor.

The door of this room was opened a little way, and a head projected from it.

It was a man's head.

"Who is it, I say? Is it thieves, or fire, or murder? Who is it, I say?"

"The devil!" said Turpin, and darting forward he caught hold of the knob of the door before the man could withdraw his head, and pulled it towards him.

The man made two or three inarticulate sounds.

Then Turpin let go of the handle of the door.

Down fell the man like a log of wood.

"I've done for him, that's pretty clear," said Dick, as he opened up a third flight of stairs.

This storey appeared to be untenanted.

He opened one of the doors, of which there were two before him.

It led into a garret.

A glance told him no one was there, and he shut the door behind him at once, just as he heard a tremendous disturbance in the lower part of the house.

"They have found their way in," he gasped, as he fastened the frail door behind him. "What shall I do now?"

In fact, Turpin had ascended the stairs without a thought as to what he was to do when he reached the top. He had merely acted upon the impulse which prompted him to place as great a distance as he could between himself and his foes.

He looked round the attic in which he stood.

It was scantily furnished.

Two chairs.

A table.

In one corner a stump bedstead.

Against the wall a lilliputian looking-glass.

These were all the room contained.

The fastening upon the door, which was very old and frail, were merely a couple of bolts.

This, he felt, would be no obstacle to his foes, whom he could now hear rushing up the staircase.

He cast his eyes upon the bed.

He might, perhaps, he thought, by dragging that from its present position, and placing it against the door, hinder for a little while their entrance.

This he determined to do, and caught hold of the foot of the bed for that purpose.

But, alas! for the insecurity of things in this world. No sooner did he attempt to drag it forward than the lower part came away in his hands, and the whole reached the floor in one grand smash.

This was vexatious in the extreme.

Not only had he wasted moments when every moment was of inestimable value, but he had raised such a sound as could not fail to indicate his exact position.

He ran to the window, and flung it open.

It looked on to the roof, in which, indeed, it was made.

About six feet off was a gutter filled with black, oozy mud, and on the other side of that gutter a crumbling stone parapet, some eighteen inches in height.

"I must make my way over the roofs, I suppose," said Dick, "and trust to fate for the result."

As he spoke he clambered through the window and lowered himself into the gutter.



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL LISTEN TO THE MYSTERIOUS SOUNDS.]

He did not stay to close it after him; he was well aware his foes already knew his exact location, and that when they entered and found the room empty they would, of course, run to the window.

Dick scratched his hands and broke his nails in his progress down the slanting roof, but otherwise he sustained no injury.

His feet sank deeply into the mud in the gutter.

It was not without some misgiving that he stood where he did. He could not tell how secure it was, or how soon he might be precipitated into the street below.

CHAPTER CV.

DICK WURPIN'S POSITION DOES NOT GET ANY BETTER; IN FACT PERILS INCREASE.

Every moment now, however, only served to give him confidence, and with the feeling pressing upon him that there was no time for delay, he crawled as quickly as he could along the gutter.

After proceeding about a dozen yards, however, he came to a house that was some three feet higher than its neighbours.

Hitherto he had been careful not to let his head be seen over the top of the parapet by those who were doubtless watching for him below, but now he would be obliged to run the risk of being seen unless he chose to remain where he was, and that would be to ensure his capture.

He hesitated a little.

The accomplishment merely of the feat of climbing from one roof to the other was full of peril.

But if he was to escape it must be tried, and although he was almost powerless from the fatigue he had hitherto experienced, he summoned all his fortitude to his aid, and resolved to make the attempt.

He stood up in the gutter, and placed his hands on the roof of the adjoining house, in order to draw himself up.

The moment he did so a loud shout arose.

He would not resist turning his head and looking in the direction whence it proceeded.

This was from the street below.

Dick looked down.

It was crowded with an excited mass of persons.

Upon observing that his face was turned toward them they set up another shout.

Dick only gave a glance, and then he turned his whole attention to the task he had set himself.

Slowly and carefully he drew himself up.

And all the time he was in full sight of the people.

A woman who was amongst them, and who carried on her head a basket of suspicious-looking fish, exclaimed in shrill, shrewish tones,—

"Fetch him down—fetch him down, or he will escape. Hurl a stone at him, and fetch him down."

There was something so enchanting to the minds of the persons composing the crowd in fetching a man off the roof of a house with throwing stones, that, uttering a cry of delight, they at once set about putting her suggestion into execution.

A shower of missiles of all descriptions were aimed at Turpin.

But, luckily for him, when the first were thrown he had just succeeded in reaching the roof of the house, and he crouched down close to the parapet, which on that one happened to be a good two feet in height.

By this means he escaped the greater part of them.

Then Dick heard a loud hurrah in his rear, and he turned round, although he knew well enough from whence it proceeded.

Those who had violently broken into the house had reached the attic window.

"Surrender, Dick Turpin," cried a voice, "surrender, or you are a dead man!"

The only notice Dick took of this speech was to crawl still further, and with increased speed, along the parapet.

It is wonderful what danger people will run for money. Under ordinary circumstances there was not one of the men who were chasing Turpin that would have attempted that which they now performed.

They scrambled recklessly off the window, and rolled down the roof until their further progress was stayed by the parapet, which vibrated before the shocks that were given to it.

But regaining their feet in an incredibly short space of time, they crept along the gutter in this direction of their prey.

As soon as Dick Turpin saw this movement on the part of his foes, he felt more than ever the necessity there was for him to use all his endeavours to escape them.

His position was a most perplexing one.

So far from having bettered his condition, he, as he glanced about him, felt pretty well convinced that he had made it worse.

He had crawled for some distance along the housetops, when a very serious obstacle presented itself.

He had reached a point where a narrow street diverged from the main one.

"Too wide," muttered Dick, as he peered over cautiously, and saw that, narrow as the street was, the space between the houses was too great to make a jump practicable. "Too wide. Which way shall I turn?"

That, however, was most essentially a moment for action—not hesitation.

There was but one resource, and that was to crawl along the roofs of the houses abutting upon the narrow street even as he had done the others.

Dick was agile, and he got along at a much swifter rate than his pursuers, besides which he had a good start, and the distance between them, instead of diminishing, increased.

The mob which choked up the front street, as we may call it, did not observe the highwayman turn the corner. The stone masses effectually shrouded him from their observation.

Their whole attention was absorbed in watching the progress of the officers who were full in view, for not having the motive for concealing themselves that Dick had, they made their way in an erect posture, which they found was easiest for them.

Of course Dick was now, owing to having turned the corner, out of sight of his pursuers.

This was an event which might not occur again, and,

after having with some difficulty got round a street of chimneys, which in themselves would serve in no small degree to shield him, Dick began to look about him for a hiding place.

To have continued along the housetops would have been madness, for the officers would have nothing to do but take up such positions as would make his interception certain.

His only chance, and that was a faint one indeed, was this.

To enter unperceived one of the houses in the street and find some place of concealment there until such time as he could emerge with safety.

But the difficulty of doing this was, one would think, insuperable or nearly so.

The whole neighbourhood appeared to be aroused.

The inhabitants of the houses would not fail to be on the alert.

Besides, if he did enter, although the officers might not know the exact spot, yet they would be able to tell where he had disappeared to a trifle, and then all they would have to do would be to post sentinels, and make a perquisition of the suspected houses.

Imminency of danger has the effect of enhancing the power of the mind, and all these deliberations presented themselves simultaneously to Turpin.

To remain where he was, however, was but to entail inevitable capture, so, as he knew he could not make his position much worse than it was, he resolved to make an entrance into one of the houses, and chance it.

One which seemed likely to answer his purpose was about half-a-dozen yards off, and he made his way towards it at full speed.

"Thank heaven!" he said, as he reached a small attic window in the tiles, one-half of which swung invitingly open. "Thank heaven, they have not seen me yet. Let me hope there is no one in the place to interfere with me."

As he spoke Dick raised his head, so that his eyes were just above the level of the window-sill.

"Empty!" he said, with a gush of grateful feeling at his heart. "Empty! There is hope yet—all may be well."

With the greatest eagerness, now, he drew himself up, and, taking care not to raise his body any higher than he could help, crawled head-foremost into the room.

Scarcely, however, had his feet touched the floor, than he heard a shout, and a mighty rush of many footsteps.

He closed the window with great rapidity. It was less likely to excite suspicion than if he had allowed it to remain open.

"They have turned the corner," he said. "Heaven help me! This street is now choked up with people, making escape a matter of impossibility."

A loud hurrah from the mob reached his ears at this juncture, but what it signified he could form no notion.

"They think it fine fun," I daresay, he said, "to hunt a fellow-creature, like some wild animal, to death. But they have not caught me yet."

Having fastened the window, he turned round to examine the room.

But nowhere could he see an at all practicable hiding-place.

The door was just opposite the window, and he hastened towards it.

He placed his hand upon the latch, and lifted it stealthily then, holding the door open about a quarter of an inch, he listened.

All was still.

—Having in this way assured himself that there was no one on the other side, he opened the door and stepped out upon the landing.

This place was profoundly dark; indeed, the only illumination it ever had was what reached it when the attic door was open.

Now it was close shut.

The fastenings of this attic door were all on the inner side, or Dick would have secured the door in some way.

He had, however, noticed the position of the stairs, and placing his hand upon the balustrade, he began to descend them cautiously.

As he proceeded he found he was able to see a little about him, which showed some rays of light found their way there, though he could not perceive their source.

At length he reached the landing on the floor beneath him.

Here he paused.

There was no sound in his rear indicative that the officers had traced him, but how long that would be the case was more than he could tell.

"What kind of house is this, I wonder?" he asked himself. "If I knew, it would be of material aid to me, since then I should know better what to do; now I am all abroad. Ha! what is that?"

A lumbering noise, which clearly came from an attic above, reached his ears.

At the same moment a door, within a few inches of which he had been standing, was flung open.

A flood of light, for such, by the contrast, it seemed to be, lighted up the landing.

"What is it?" said a voice, in accents of alarm.

"What is it?"

CHAPTER C/I.

THE CUPBOARD PROVES A DANGEROUS HIDING-PLACE FOR DICK.

DICK saw that it was a young woman, carrying a child in her arms, who had asked the question.

Before she had time to give any alarm or notice that he was there even, Turpin rushed into the room, and closing the door, put his back against it.

"Silence!" he said, in a low, but fierce whisper. "Silence! If you so much as raise your voice above a whisper, even to pronounce one word, that moment is your last."

"Oh, heaven have mercy upon me, and save me," said the woman, sinking upon her knees in an agony of fright. "Spare me and my little one."

"Rise," said Dick. "I intend no harm against you or your child either, so long as you do not, by making an outcry, provoke me to it. Will you be silent?"

"Oh, yes. Have mercy, good sir. I will be very silent indeed. What is it you want?"

Dick looked earnestly into the woman's face in order to judge, by its expression, how far he might trust her.

The day was fading fast, and evening creeping on, but still there came into that room sufficient light to serve his purpose.

She was young—not twenty at the most, but already had care and want and grief marred the beauty of her countenance. Her eyes and cheeks were sunken and hollow, her lips thin and bloodless, and her whole body as much emaciated as one in the last stage of marasmus.

Not despite of this, Dick saw at a glance that in her girlhood she must have been very beautiful. Her hair was dark and fine in texture, and there was about her that nameless something, which, under all circumstances, clings to those who are gently born and delicately nurtured.

The child which she held in her arms, and clasped to her bosom with maternal tenderness, was a diminutive, puny thing, devoid, apparently, of all animation save that which existed in its preternaturally large eyes.

Famine and misery had already set their stamp upon the poor little creature, and Dick felt a strange feeling at his heart as he gazed upon it.

All around, too, could be seen traces of poverty the most abject. The bare walls—the bare floor—the fireless grate—the miserable heap of rags in one corner which served as a bed—the broken window—the absence of all the necessities of life, bespoke the fact that gaunt and hungry want there held dominion.

All this Dick saw at one brief glance.

There was something in this woman's countenance, notwithstanding the havoc which misery and sorrow had made upon it, the look Dick saw possessed a kindly part. He did not the more hesitate to inform her who and what he was.

"Again," he said, "again I tell you, you have nought to fear! All I ask is that you will conceal me somewhere, and should my enemies, who are now thirsting for my blood, inquire whether you have seen me, that you will tell them no, and by that means save my life."

"I cannot—I cannot."

"You cannot?"

"No. There is no place here where you could hide."

And I am so terrified and nervous that they would be sure to suspect your presence here from my manner."

"Madam," said Dick, "let me not appeal to you in vain. My life is wholly in your hands. You can save me or you can destroy me. Surely you would not willingly be the means of bringing anyone to death, even though he was your enemy, which heaven knows I am not."

"No—no! Oh! what is that? what is that?"

"My enemies!" said Dick. "I am unarmed, and cannot defend myself. Will you deliver me into their hands, or will you hide me from them?"

The poor woman, who was almost distraught with fear, began to weep.

Turpin got desperate.

"Hark!" he said, "they are on the stairs; can you hear them? Others are trampling overhead. In another moment they will be here. Hide me somewhere, and I will reward you well."

"Look round," said the woman. "Where can you secrete yourself?"

"Here," said Dick, as with a bound he reached a cupboard door. "In here."

"But they will find you there."

"Not if you tell them you have not seen me."

"Be it so, then. I will try."

The cupboard towards which Dick had hastened was in a kind of recess.

It was divided into two portions.

He chose the lower, because there was but one shelf in it.

With great speed he crawled in, and then he said—

"Bring some of those bed-things and stuff them in. Then, if they should be suspicious enough to look in, they will not see me."

With trembling limbs the poor woman did his bidding, and scarcely had she crammed the last article in, and turned the little button which served as a fastening to the cupboard, than a loud authoritative knock was given to the door.

Truly was Dick Turpin in an unenviable predicament. He was a prisoner, without the least power to release himself, and not only had he to trust to the woman keeping good faith with him, but to her having sufficient command over her words and actions not to generate suspicion in the minds of the officers that he was there.

There was only this one circumstance in Dick's favour, and that was that he had left no clue by which the officers could trace him to the house in which he was, which made a vast difference indeed; for, of course, they could not tell precisely in which one he had taken refuge.

The poor woman, who all this time had never put the child out of her arms, opened the door in answer to the summons.

Her surprise at seeing there several police-officers was real, for, Dick had merely told her that his enemies were seeking him, and the idea that he was a criminal never once entered her imagination.

The officers rushed at once into the room and glared about them.

"What is it you want, gentlemen? What is it you want? We have done nothing wrong, I can assure you."

"We don't say as how you have, but we're aft some one we suspects has got into this ere house. He long have you been here?"

"Six months, next quarter-day, sir!"

"Pho! pho! I don't mean that. How long have you been in this room to-day? When were you out last?"

"At dinner-time, sir."

"Oh! very good! That will do. Now, while you have been here have you seen a stranger in the house? A man dressed like a farmer?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure he has not been here?"

"Quite sure, sir; for how could he come in without my knowing?"

"True; but have you heard no one?"

"Oh! yes. This house, you see, is let out to poor folks, and some one or other is continually going up and down stairs."

"Oh! and that is so often the case that, if you heard anyone on the stairs, you would not open the door to see who it was?"

"Not unless I thought it was my husband, sir."

"Ah! you have a husband, have you? And where is he, pray?"

"Here!" said a voice; and a young man, pale, thin, and wretched-looking as his wife, sprang into the room.

"Seize him," roared the officer in command. "Seize him!"

"No, no. Have mercy: Why do you seek him?"

"Let him go," said the officer. "That is not him."

"What is all this, Mary?" said the young man, with a bewildered air. "What does it mean?"

"We are officers," said the one who had ordered him to be seized, taking a constable's staff of authority from his pocket; "we are officers in search of a notorious criminal, who we suspects is hid somewhere in this house."

"But why did you seize me?"

"Just to make sure you wasn't him, to be sure."

"But he is not here, Mary, is he? Why don't you tell them so?"

It was the first time Mary had ever deceived her husband, and she hesitated a moment before she replied:

"I have told them," she said, "but they don't seem to believe me."

"Why, sir, you see," said the officer, who had previously spoken, "he is so full of all sorts of tricks, that a fox is quite a fool to him, and not no mistake, and so you see we is a kind of doubtful like."

"Just so. But who is he?"

"Well, we don't mind telling you, because you don't seem very well off."

"God help us! No. We—we are starving!"

"Just so, and that makes us think you will be glad of a chance of earning a part of the reward which is offered for the apprehension of Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"And do you mean to say he is in this house?"

"Why, not exactly that, but we have traced him to somewhere close at hand. Help us, and if we catch him you shall have ten pounds for your share."

"Ten pounds!" said the young man, who made a rapid mental calculation of how much food such a sum would buy for his wife and children. "Ten pounds?"

"Yes, and now perhaps you wouldn't mind us making a search here?"

"By no means," said the young man. "It can't take you long."

The wife sank down in an agony of tears.

"There seems to be but one place in the room where he could hide," continued the officer, "and that is the cupboard yonder. If he's there we'll soon have him out."

The poor woman gave a shriek as she saw the officer draw his cutlass, and walk up to the cupboard door.

CHAPTER CVII.

OLD MATTHEW IS RATHER UNEASY IN HIS MIND ABOUT TOM KING.

"Don't be afraid, mum," he said, on hearing the cry, and attributing it to a widely different cause to that which in reality called it into existence; "don't be afraid, mum, we won't hurt you. We would not search at all, only it will be a sort of satisfaction; you see he is so uncommon cunning."

Poor Dick!

We have seen him in many perilous situations in the course of this eventful narrative, but never in so perilous a one as the present.

Discovery, one would think, upon the officer opening the door, would immediately ensue.

The woman who had befriended him made sure that all was over, and hid her face in her hands.

The top portion of the cupboard was first thrown open.

There were five shelves, but every one of them was quite bare.

"He isn't there, at all events," said the officer; "—say, my friend, you haven't much of a larder."

The others laughed.

"I have already told you," said the young man, "that we are starving."

"Come on, then, and I only hope we capture him, and you will have enough to live on for I don't know how long. Now what shall we find here?"

While thus speaking he turned the button, and opened the door of the lower cupboard.

"Hallo!" he said, "why here's a lot of rags here."

The husband looked rather surprised to see the bed-clothes bundled up into the cupboard in that fashion.

"Oh! he ain't there, that's very clear! However, just to make certain."

And he plunged his cutlass three times into the mass of rags.

It is very certain Dick Turpin owed his life, or at all events his escape, on that occasion, to the merest chance circumstances in the world.

On entering the cupboard he had laid himself down as flat as he could; but when he did so it was without having any motive for so doing.

The consequence of this apparently simple action was, that he escaped contact with the cutlass when the officer made the three fierce and random stabs at it.

"No! he isn't there," said the officer, "and now for the rest of the house. I've got some one at the door below, and on the roof above, and so they have over all the other houses on this side of the street, so he can't escape."

With this sentence, the officer and the men he had with him, hastened from the room.

The poor woman's husband accompanied them.

As soon as she was sure she was quite alone, for Mary—we may as well call her by that name, since her husband laid—Mary, we say, went to the room-door, and watched them descend the flight of stairs.

To accompany them in what the reader knows was such a perfectly useless search, would be anything but interesting. It is with Turpin and the wife that we have now to do.

Having watched them enter the room on the floor below, she very carefully closed her own door, and going up to the cupboard, she said,—

"Oh, sir—speak—speak. Speak at once, and relieve my heart by telling me you are not much hurt. Speak. Oh, speak at once."

She waited a moment, and then finding no reply came, she said,—

"Oh, he is dead—dead. What shall I do now? Oh, what shall I do?"

Tears streamed from her eyes.

Of a truth was Turpin right when he divined she had a tender heart.

To her, guilty though he was, there seemed something terrible and unnatural in thus seeking to drag a fellow-creature to death.

But Dick was very far indeed from dead, and he hesitated to reply solely because he was in doubt whether it would be safe for him to do so.

Her evident distress made him resolve to run the risk of being heard by his foes.

"Fear nothing, Mary," he said. "I'm safe and unhurt. I will, however, stay here until I am assured that my pursuers have left the place. As for your husband, you must let him know I am here. They have promised him ten pounds to aid in my capture or my death. I will give him thrice ten if he will aid me to escape."

"Oh! sir, do not think us so mercenary as that, or suspect my husband of such a fault. We are starving, sir, or he would not have done as he has."

"Say no more about that. Be silent, I pray. Your words may be overheard. Suffer me to remain here where I am until the officers have left the house."

"I will, sir—I will. But are you sure you are unhurt?"

"Quite, quite."

Mary withdrew, and seated herself near the empty grate.

She shivered, out it was more from fright than cold.

Night was coming on now with rapid strides.

The gloom in that miserable chamber deepened.

But the poor woman made no attempt to dissipate it.

Their last candle had been burned, and she had not a fraction wherewith to buy another.

The preceding day the pawnbroker in the next street had taken the last article they had that was of the slightest value, and with the few pence thus provided they purchased a loaf of bread.

It grew darker and darker.

And as the obscurity increased, so did the multitudinous noises which are ever heard in a great city subside.

Cramped up in that narrow cupboard, breathing with difficulty, and not able to stir hand or foot, Turpin listened with an intensity which can only be conceived for some sounds which would indicate the position of his foes.

But none came.

At length, when positive silence had prevailed for a long period, and when he felt almost certain that the officers had left the house, he tapped gently with his fingers against the panel of the cupboard.

Mary rose instantly and went towards it.

"What is it?" she asked. "Oh! what is it?"

"Find out, if you can do so without exciting suspicion, whether the officers have left the house. I trust to you not to betray me."

"Oh! sir. Do not think of that. I would not be guilty of such a thing for worlds! Besides, you ought to trust me. If I had wished to do so, what would have prevented me disclosing your hiding-place when the officers were here in the room?"

"Nothing," said Turpin. "I can trust you, I am sure. But above all things, excite no suspicion."

Without another word the poor woman made her way across the dark room, and down the still darker stairs.

It was an anxious time for Dick while she was absent, not that he had any doubts of her good faith, but what he feared most was that, if the officers should still be lurking about, they would suspect her.

But this dread had no foundation. In a very few minutes he heard her footsteps on the stairs.

"All is well!" she said.

"The officers have left the house?"

"Yes, some time ago."

"Very good!" said Turpin. "Then just open the door, and I'll come out."

The little button which fastened the cupboard was turned, and Dick scrambled out.

He was glad enough to stretch his legs.

"How confoundedly dark the place is!" he said.

"Yes; but you are not afraid of the darkness surely; and besides, it will be much safer for you to be in the dark."

"You are right!"

"I am sorry I have no better accommodation to offer you, but you see here all that we have."

"Thank goodness!" said Dick, "I am in a position to recompense you amply for having saved my life, and I will take care to do so."

"But I should be very much hurt indeed, sir, although we are so bad off, if you thought that I have only acted as I have in the hopes of getting money."

"I would not do you that injustice for a moment, and there is no reason why I should not display my gratitude for the service you have rendered me in the best way I can."

"Alas! sir. You cannot think how such a life as we are leading now grieves me. It is so different to the future I pictured for myself on my wedding-day! I am almost heart-broken."

"Do not weep," said Turpin, as the poor woman burst into a flood of tears. "Do not weep! Hope for better times!"

"I have hoped on many a weary month. Hoped against hope! and every succeeding day only served to show our position to be worse than it was on the preceding one."

"It is so."

"Those who have not experienced it cannot know what it is. What we are to do, I know not."

"We must talk about that. When do you expect your husband back?"

"Every moment. Hark! I can hear him now coming up the stairs."

"Indeed! Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"Then I shall leave you to tell him what I am."

CHAPTER CVM.

DICK TURPIN, NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, DOES A GOOD ACTION.

"STAND back into the darkness yonder near the cupboard," said the woman; "he will not see you there. I am going to open the door."

Dick felt his way as cautiously and silently across the

room as he could, until he reached the cupboard, where he paused.

Mary opened the door of the room, and stepped out upon the landing.

"Robert," she said, "Robert, is that you?"

"Yes, Mary, I am here."

The voice was one saddened with disappointment.

"I am so glad you have come back, Robert."

"Glad! You ought instead to curse the hour when first you saw me, for it is I alone that have brought all this want and misery upon you."

"No, do not say that, Robert," said Mary; and Dick, whose eyes were accustomed to the darkness of the room, could see that she had laid her head upon her husband's shoulder. "Don't say that, Robert, because it is not true. You could not avoid misfortune."

"No, dearest. Heaven knows if I could have avoided all the evils that have come upon us I would have done so gladly! But it has been through no fault of mine."

"I know that, Robert, and therefore you were wrong to blame yourself as you did. I could not bear to hear that."

"Heaven bless you!" said Robert, in a husky voice.

"You are an angel, Mary. How wretched I should have been without you!"

There was a silence of some few minutes' duration.

Dick, whose heart was full of kindly sympathies, was deeply affected at this scene, and he rejoiced at the chance which had put him in the way of affording them at any rate a temporary respite from their misery.

Still he held back. He felt how impolitic it would have been to have disclosed his presence before Mary had warned her husband of it.

Mary was sobbing.

"Cheer up, Mary, darling!" said Robert, with an effort. "Cheer up, dear one! Surely we have now known the worst that can befall us, and such being the case, things must take a turn for the better."

"I hope so, Robert. But you went out with those officers. Did they capture the man they sought?"

"No, Mary, or I should have let you know it before this. We searched everywhere, but we could find no trace of him."

"But, Robert, suppose you had found him, and that you had received the money, do you think it would ever have done us any good? No, Robert, I am sure it would not, because it would have been the price of blood."

"Well, well, it is not worth while to talk about that now. He has escaped, and so I did not get the money."

"You speak angrily—regretfully."

"Do I? Then forgive me for it."

"I know you have had enough to try your temper and make you repine. Let us still hope that better times are coming."

"I begin to fear that is a hope which will never be realized, and I am sure to-night it seems further off than ever."

"No."

"No, do you say, Mary? What has happened, then?"

"Tell me, oh! tell me."

"You promise you will not act rashly, but wait until you have heard all?"

"All what?"

"You shall know in good time. Do you promise, Robert?"

"I do, I do."

"I take you at your word. Now, sir, come forward and speak for yourself!"

The room was too dark for the expression of wonderment upon Robert's face to be seen, but he gave a great start when he heard some one walk across the room towards him.

"Who—what is this, Mary? Speak, tell me!"

"Make no alarm," said Dick, in those peculiar quiet tones which are more effective in arresting anyone's attention than loud ones, "make no alarm. All will be explained."

"But who is this, Mary? what does he here?"

"That you shall learn in good time. I am here because I sought shelter from my enemies, and because your wife, whom heaven bless for being a true and noble-hearted woman, succoured and shielded me from them."

"Then, then—"

"What, my friend?"

"You are the man of whom they came in search?"
 "I am. I fear not to disclose myself to you. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

Robert was so overcome by this revelation that he was full a minute before he could recover himself sufficiently to speak.

"Do not blame me, Robert, for what I have done," said his wife; "I could not have borne the thought of handing him over to his foe."

"But he is a criminal?"

"I have no proof of that. He has done me no harm; nor you either, to my knowledge."

"I am here," said Dick again. "You can betray me if you choose!"

"No, no. That would be base."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. As you must know, you've no special feeling against me, for to the best of my belief we have never met until this moment."

"I cannot see your face, Mr.—a—a—"

"Turpin."

"I cannot see your face, but there is nothing in your voice familiar to me. Its tones, too, are those of one who would not deceive."

"I am glad you have so good an opinion of me. Had it not been for your wife, of whom, indeed, you should be proud, for she has an angel's spirit!"

"God bless her! Yes," interrupted the husband, as he kissed her on the cheek.

"Had it not been for her, I say, I should have been in the hands of my enemies and a prisoner, but I appealed to her to save me, and she did so."

"I know she would. But where did you hide? I myself searched this place thoroughly."

"The cupboard."

"But you were not there?"

"I was, in the lower half of it."

"Then you are wounded?"

"No."

"By what means, then, did you escape the officer's sword? He plunged it three times through the clothes."

"Fortunately I lay in such a position that they did not reach me. He would have hit in a moment if he had, and then I should have been dragged forth."

"Good gracious!" said Robert, drawing a long breath, "what a narrow escape!"

"Narrow indeed! But do not let us talk about that. I escaped, and am free."

Dick paused a moment. He hardly knew in what way to mould his speech.

"Do not be offended with me if I make a remark, but you are poor?"

The husband and the wife were silent.

"The evidences of it are too palpable to be overlooked. But from the words and manner of both of you I can tell it is not your natural state. I can tell you have occupied a very different position. Do not think, however, that I wish to pry into your past life. You have been unfortunate."

"We have, indeed," said Robert, in a broken voice. "most unfortunate. But we could not help it. The circumstances were entirely beyond our own control."

"I can readily enough believe that."

"I have borne against them as well as could—tried every means to keep the wolf from the door, but in vain—always in vain. I have walked on from end to end in search of employment, but found none, except, indeed, when I have had some casual job."

"Labour is abundant in London, and ever will be. To the end there will always be more hands than there is work for them to do."

"I knew all that, sir, but still I came, hoping to do better. It is that which grieves me to the soul."

Mary crept yet closer to him.

"Were it not for my wife here, I know not what I should have done. But she has proved an angel. She came home from which I took her was, if not a luxurious, yet a comfortable one—and now—now look at this."

Turpin was deeply moved at this scene; and he rejoiced within himself to think he had the power of alleviating some portion of their distress.

"But Mary, heaven bless her," continued Robert, speaking from his heart, "has never uttered one word of complaint, but borne all in silence. I speak to you thus, although I cannot see your face, but yet your voice tells

me you are one that can sympathize with us, and understand how dear such conduct must make her to me. She has been a true wife indeed."

Closer—yet closer Mary clung to her husband. Every word of eulogy he uttered was a reward to her, for she loved him as few women have the power of loving.

It seems hard that cold hearts should ever know so much suffering, and yet it is only too frequently the case. Still, when they have weathered through the storm, they are happier for the contrast; but in London how many there are who perish for every one that is saved.

The silence that ensued was an embarrassing one for Dick. He could tell both Mary and Robert were much moved, and with a natural delicacy, he shrunk from intruding any remark upon them.

"Oh! Robert," whispered Mary, "I am so very—very happy."

And then Dick could tell a gush of tears had come to her relief.

CHAPTER CIX.

DICK TURPIN PAYS A FLYING VISIT TO THE "WHITE HORSE" INN IN DRURY-LANE.

"PARDON me, my friends," said Dick, after allowing time for the pent-up feelings of the wife to have full vent. "Pardon me, but—"

"Nay, sir," replied Robert, with an effort to speak cheerfully. "It is we who ought to ask pardon of you for having been so selfish as to forget you, and the danger you are in."

"Will you listen to me, and promise not be offended at what I say?"

"I think I can safely do that, for, unless I am indeed very much mistaken, you are not one who would say anything unpleasant."

"I am glad you think so! And, in the first place, you—or your wife rather, has rendered me the greatest service which you possibly could—you saved my life! Now, I am not one who expresses his gratitude by words alone, and therefore I desire that you will accept at my hands some more substantial token of it. Let no false pride be suffered to intervene between us. It so happens that I am in a situation to render you a service, though not commensurate with the one you rendered me; and, believe me, I shall be more hurt than words can express, if you refuse to allow me this opportunity of testifying my gratitude."

"Say on, sir—say on!"

"Then what I wish to offer you is a sum of money sufficiently large to give you a fresh start in life."

"Oh! sir, you are too good! Ought we, Mary, to accept of this?"

"Let me answer for her," said Dick. "Just now you were willing, for the sake of the reward, to assist those who came to capture me! In the event, I presume, of their having done so, you would not have scrupled to accept the money! If this is so, surely it ought to be more satisfactory to receive it for having saved a life!"

"I have listened to you," said Robert, "and have not been offended at what you have said. Now it is my turn to ask the same of you."

"I cannot do otherwise than assent, but—"

"Nay, hear me! You know our position, or at all events sufficient to comprehend it. We are starving—yes, starving is the word—but, for all that, we are happy. Every article of the slightest value which we possessed, with the exception of what you see, has been made away with. I knew the end must come at last, and so it has. We have reached to-day. Now, sir, you will understand what I am about to say. For the service I have rendered you I cannot—ought not to receive money as compensation, badly as I need it."

But this is carrying it too far," interrupted Dick.

"Nay, do not speak, sir, until you have heard me out. With a small sum of money my wife and myself could take some business. We are willing, we should work—we should succeed; I feel convinced of that."

"And so do I," said Dick; "you are a worthy fellow, and if you do not succeed no one ought to; therefore I beg you will accept—"

"I have not yet finished, sir, but I shall in a few moments. It would be against and contrary to my nature to accept such a sum from any one—as a gift."

"But it is not a gift," replied Turpin; "it is payment merely for service rendered or work done."

"I cannot look upon it in that light, but I feel that if I refused all help at your hands, I should not only be unjust to my wife and children, but ungrateful to you. Therefore if you will lend me for the space of twelve months the sum of twenty pounds you will be rendering a service the extent of which we can neither of us estimate."

"And is that all?" said Dick, "then you shall have your wish. Not twenty, however, but forty, and I shall tie you to no time for repayment."

"Forty pounds!" said Robert; "that is a large sum to anyone, and I have no security to offer you."

"No security? you have the best—an best invention to repay me."

"If that is security, I have it."

"Here, Mary," said Dick, as he slipped some money in her hand; go and buy a light, and we will settle this little business."

Mary was gone but a moment. In fact, the basement of the house was a huckster's shop, where such things as candles were sold.

The light which it gave when it was placed upon the chimney-piece, for there was no table in the room, was but ghastly and feeble, but yet sufficed to light up three happy faces.

Never in his life probably had Dick had such a sensation of satisfaction at his heart. He was conscious of having done a good action.

The forty pounds were counted out, which was, in truth, nearly all the money Dick possessed, and Robert would insist upon writing out a proper acknowledgment of the debt.

"And now that is settled," said Dick, "let us turn to other subjects."

"Excuse me a moment."

"Willingly, my friend."

"But where shall we find you a twelvemonth hence?"

"Do you think you will be able to repay me then?"

"I hope the whole of it, but at all events a portion of it."

Dick mused for a moment, and then he said—

"It is very hard indeed to say where I may be a twelvemonth hence, but if you will take it to the 'White Horse' public-house in Drury-lane, and give it to the landlord, Old Matthew, as he is called, it will be all right."

"I shall not forget, sir, and in twelve months' time from this very day I will be there."

"I will endeavour to be there, too, for I shall be anxious to know how far you have been successful. It is likely enough we may meet before that time."

"And now, sir, you were going to say something else."

"I was, and that is, I wish to leave here as quickly now as possible. It is getting late. The officers doubtless have given up all hopes of my capture; still I do not wish to risk anything by being foolishly incautious."

"Of course not."

"I wish you, then, as a favour, to go to some second-hand clothes shop in the neighbourhood and buy a large horseman's cloak, with which I can disguise myself, as my dress, doubtless, has been accurately described."

"I will do it, sir."

"Here is the money. Be as quick as you can, yet above all things do not excite suspicion. You will also be able to tell whether there are any officers lurking about."

Robert was only too glad to be of assistance to his benefactor, and he started off at once.

At this moment there was a faint, wailing cry.

The child, which during the preceding scene had been sleeping in its little apology for a bed, awoke.

The mother's tones were very different now from what they had been. Her heart was light. At the last hour, when fate seemed most unpropitious, fortune had smiled upon her.

She held the child up to the light, which the little creature contemplated with evident delight.

"And now, Mary," said Dick, "for I hope you will look upon me quite as an old friend, and allow me to add you my title, you will not refuse me permission, I am certain, to make your child some little present in remembrance of me."

"You are too good, sir."

"Nay."

"You have already done enough—and more than enough."

"Here is a guinea. Take it, and understand it is for the child. Use it to no other purpose. It will enable you to buy it warm and comfortable apparel."

Poor Mary. She had borne up through all the time of trouble, but now that her fortune had come upon her she was weak and wept like a child.

"Your heart is a good one, sir, I am sure," she said.

"I can appreciate a kindness," said Dick, deprecatingly, "but that probably is because it is a thing I so rarely meet with, and I feel a pleasure in conferring happiness when I can. There is so little of it in the world, that no one, if he has it in his power, ought to hesitate to bestow it to the full extent of his ability."

At this moment Robert returned.

"Here is, I fancy, just the thing you want, sir," he said, holding open a horseman's cloak of thick blue cloth, and exaggerated size. It will cover you up completely."

"And was the coast clear?"

"Quite."

"Farewell, then, my kind friends, and accept of my best wishes. May you prosper in the world as you deserve to do; and when you hear anything in disfavour of Dick Turpin, the highwayman, put the good action he has done this night in the opposite scale, and weigh it against it."

"You will be always remembered by us as a saviour," said Mary, taking Dick's hand between both hers. "Had it not been for your chance presence here what would have become of us?"

"Good-bye, Mary, do not think of that. You have only your own kind heart to thank. Had you not extended a helping hand to me, I should not have had this opportunity of saving you."

"Good-bye, sir," said Mary, tearfully. "I—I—"

She would have said, she hoped to hear he had ceased to become amenable to the laws, but as she thought it would sound like a reproach, she checked herself, and said instead,—

"I wish I could find words to thank you."

"And now, sir, will you permit me to go a little way with you. I am known, and it would, perhaps, be the means of warding off suspicion from you."

CHAPTER CX.

DICK TURPIN STOPS A BAGMAN ON HIGHGATE-RISE.

"THANKS, my friend, I accept your offer gladly. I have no very clear idea of my locality, except that I am near Smithfield Market."

"Come then, sir, let us start at once."

And after one more farewell to Mary, who stood at the top of the stairs with the candle in her hand, Dick followed his new friend into the street.

Turpin cast an anxious glance about him.

The street was dark, narrow, and winding, but so far as he could see there was no one in view.

"I really think they have left the spot," said Robert.

"Hush! do not speak. We may be overheard."

"In which direction did you wish to go, sir?"

"To Drury-lane."

"Shall you walk?"

"No; not only would it be tiring, but hazardous. I will take a hackney-coach."

"Very good, sir, then come this way; the second turning to the right will take us out on to Snow-hill, and on the other side of Holborn-bridge you will be almost sure to get one."

The distance to this place was short.

They halted for a minute at the corner, and then they heard one come lumbering along a great market.

Robert hailed it, and the driver drew up to the curbstone.

"Where to, your honour," said the jarvey, for the cloak Dick had on gave him quite an aristocratic look.

"To the corner of Princes-street in Drury-lane."

The driver touched up his cattle, and Dick shook hands with Robert for the last time.

"Well," said Dick to himself, as he settled himself in the carriage, "this has been a day of adventures, and no mistake. However, this is one I shall never have to meet

BACK to wish regret. I should like to know whether it was really all genuine. I shall know, though, if they return the money at the twelve months' end; but I'll not take it, not I."

He was silent for a minute, for the thought of where he was likely to be at the end of the time specified intruded itself rather unpleasantly upon his mind.

Naturally enough, this brought him to think of the condition of his friend.

"Poor Tom!" he said, "I wonder now how he is getting on? working away at his fetters, I know. But Mr. Townshend, despite your cleverness, I will free him yet! I have said it, and I will do it!"

At this moment the vehicle stopped, and looking out, he saw he had reached his destination.

He alighted, and having given the man a little more than double his fare, that worthy thought fit to say "thank you" in a dissatisfied tone of voice.

Dick stood by the post, and watched him drive along Russell-street.

Then turning to the left, he directed his steps to the "White Horse."

Dick did not enter by the front door, because if he had he would have been obliged to run the gauntlet of many prying eyes, so he turned down White Horse-yard, and stopped before the same side-door as he did when he reached the old inn, wounded and faint, on the night he stopped the Lord Mayor's carriage.

As upon that occasion, he pressed his thumb upon the doorpost, and waited.

The door was opened almost immediately by old Matthew.

His delight at seeing Dick back safe and sound was very visibly depicted upon his countenance.

"Come in, Dick, and let me shut the door," he said. "I am right down glad to see thee back, and no mistake. I saw you chased up the Old Bailey into Smithfield, for I was in Coles' shop at the time, and I have been in a terrible fidget ever since."

"Well, here I am, you see, safe and sound. Let me come and sit down a minute, and then I'm off."

Old Matthew introduced Dick into the secret room, and then he related all those particulars with which the reader has already been made familiar.

But above all was old Matthew interested in the episode of Robert and his wife Mary.

"And now, Matthew, my friend, it is time I was off. I have business I want to do to-night, but if Tom is brought to trial I shall want to provide a counsel for him."

"Oh! I'll see to that all."

"No, you won't, and no disrespect to you either. I told you before I was going to get Tom King out of Newgate myself, and I'll do it!"

"Oh! very well, very well, have your own war."

"Don't be offended, Matthew."

"Are you off, then?"

"At once."

"Ain't you going to change your clothes?"

"Oh! hang it, yes. I forgot I was dressed in this style."

"Take this candle, then. You know the way. Your clothes are just on the foot of the bed. I sent over to the costumier's for them."

"All right; and while I am gone, do you saddle Black Bess, and have her ready for me."

Dick sprang up the stairs, and into what may be called his room.

It did not take him very long to resume his ordinary appearance, and then he went down again, and left the little private parlour by a door that led into the yard.

He found Bess there waiting for him.

"Are there any suspicious characters about, Matthew?" he asked, as he sprang into the saddle.

"I haven't seen none, Dick; but I should advise you to be careful; and let me tell you, besides, that all the roads leading out of London are guarded by a troop of dragoons."

"That, for the troop of dragoons," said Dick, as he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"Ah, it's all very fine to carry things off with a high hand like that, Dick, old boy, but if you'll take a piece of friendly advice you'll be careful."

"Don't be afraid of me. I shall be back again safe and sound."

"I hope so."

"And what is more, the next time I come he'll be here to bring Tom with me."

As he thus spoke, Dick trotted Bess on into the court near its junction with Stanhop-street.

When he reached this place his thoughts involuntarily turned to the last time he stood there, and when he carried off the young girl Ellen.

"Ah, that reminds me," he said, as he changed Bess's trot to a canter, "I have not seen either her or Tom Davis for a long time, but I will try if I cannot do so to-night. Now I come to think of it, he would be just the very person I want to assist me."

Having these thoughts in his mind, he, as soon as he got clear of the houses, gave Bess the rein.

She had had a long rest, and was therefore quite fresh, and the speed with which she shot past the different objects in her route was really prodigious.

There are few things more invigorating than a few miles' gallop on horseback, and Dick became particularly conscious of it on this occasion.

He, however, reined her in to a walk upon reaching the rather steep ascent known as Highgate-rise.

The night had up to this moment been rather dark, in consequence of the heavy masses of clouds which filled the sky, but now, through a long straggling rift about half-way between the horizon and the zenith, an almost full moon peeped forth.

Her brilliancy was, however, dimmed by the vapours which floated before her disk, and the light which she sent forth was misty and uncertain.

Dick paused altogether on the top of the hill and listened.

Now, that identical spot is pretty well surrounded by buildings, and indeed forms a portion of London, but then it was quite a rustic place, with only a cottage here and there.

An intense stillness prevailed about this place at that hour, which was most delicious to the senses, but Dick, ere he had occupied this place two minutes, heard faintly the grinding of carriage wheels.

"Come!" he said; "it is a long time since I cried 'Stand, and deliver!' on the highway, and if I go much longer, I shall quite get out of practice! This, too, is a chance I cannot let go by."

So saying, he carefully examined the pistols in his holsters, which he found in excellent order.

"Who comes along the road so late, I wonder?" he said. "I shall be disappointed if it does not turn out a good booty, and one well worth the trouble. Whoever it is though, he is a long way off."

This was true, for none but the most attentive ear could have distinguished the slight noise which the rolling wheels produced.

Dick took Bess at a brisk walk down the hill, and having reached its base, where the trees grew thickly and cast a deep shadow on the roadway, he drew up as close to the hedgerow as he could, and waited.

The sound now rapidly increased.

"It is some light two-wheeled vehicle drawn by one horse," said Dick, and, just as he uttered the words, he saw two little star-like lights approaching him.

"They have the lanterns lighted! Well, never mind."

Dick suffered the gig, for such it was, to get just on a level with him, and then he darted out with the suddenness of an apparition.

A man, who was driving, was the sole occupant of the gig, and Turpin putting one of his pistols just before his face, cried—

"Pull up! Your money, or your life!"

CHAPTER CXI.

TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN GIVE TURPIN A HEARTY WELCOME AT THE "HAND AND KEYS."

NINE out of every ten persons would have done under the circumstances just what the man in the gig did, and that was to pull up at once.

"A—a highwayman!" he gasped.

"Yes," cried Turpin: "hand over whatever you have of any value about you."

"What if I refuse?"

Dick held the pistol significantly.

"You would shoot me?"



[DICK TURPIN, SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND CLAUDE DUVAL PLANNING TOM KING'S ESCAPE.]

"Precisely. Be quick."

"Then take that."

Bang went a pistol, and Dick felt something inflict a stinging sensation on his cheek.

For a moment, so sudden was the attack, he was overcome with surprise, but quickly recovering himself, he said—

"Ha! you have had your fire, so now you can't rumble if I have mine."

"No, no! Mercy, mercy! have mercy! Spare my life, and take all I have got. Mercy, mercy!"

The man in the gig was in an agony of fright, for he fully expected nothing but death as the result of his rash action.

"Your carcass is quite safe," said Dick, "provided you hand over all that you have about you in the shape of cash. Quick! and don't abuse my clemency, for if you make another attempt, I will certainly blow out your brains!"

"In a minute, sir, in a minute. It's in a minute

under the seat along with my samples. "You see I'm a bagman, sir."

"A what? Make haste."

"A bagman."

"And what on earth is a bagman?"

"A commercial traveller, sir. I represent the highly-respectable firm of Slink and Friar, No. 42, Abchurch-lane, in the City, sir."

"Oh! confound you. If you don't make haste I'll take valise and all."

"No—no, sir. Here is the bag, sir. It's not my money—not one penny of it!"

"Then you ought not to grieve so much about losing it."

"But I do. I shall lose my place."

"Oh! nonsense," said Dick, as he pocketed a large leather bag, which the "bagman," as he called himself, handed to him. "You must tell your employers you were robbed of it by Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes. Now for once I will take your word, only I caution you beforehand against deceiving me."

"What is it this bag contains?"

"Money."

"I can tell that, but to how much does it amount?"

"Seventy-three pounds odd," was the reply. shd

lose my place, I know I shall."

"Pho—pho! I know better. Good night."

Dick rode off.

The commercial traveller evidently thought it was his best policy to succumb to the force of circumstances, and he let Dick go without any aggressive act, which was more than the highwayman expected.

"Not so bad," he said, as he took his way down a narrow lane that would bring him out somewhere near his destination. "It will do to fee the counsel with in case Tom is brought to trial; but it is very odd to me if I don't get him out before the sessions come on."

Whether he did so or not remains to be seen.

The sessions came on on the Wednesday following, so at any rate he had not much time to lose.

He reached the "Cross Keys" without having encountered a soul.

Jabez, as usual, came to the front of the inn on hearing a horse's footsteps.

His joy when he saw who it was may be imagined.

Dick followed him into the stable before he attempted to enter the house.

"How are they all?" he asked; "quite well, I suppose, Jabez, eh?"

"Quite well, squire."

"I will go in and see them directly."

"You will have to look sharp, for he always closes the old crib at ten o'clock, and it's close upon that now, I'm thinking."

"It is. I can trust you to see that my mare is safe?"

"Never fear, squire; I'll fettle her as well as though you stood by and watched me."

"It won't be anything out of your way, Jabez," said Dick, as he walked towards the door of the inn.

He lifted the latch and entered.

The first person he met was Ellen.

She knew him instantly, and uttered a faint cry of recognition.

"Hullo!" said a voice, which evidently belonged to Tom Davis. "Hullo there! who is it?"

"Don't you know me, Tom? It's a long while since I was here, but I hope you have not forgotten me."

"Forgotten you! The idea of such a thing. Come in, come in, do. Why, whatever brings you here to-night?"

"I will tell you presently," replied Turpin, as, taking Ellen by the hand, he followed the landlady into the kitchen.

There was a flush of pleasure upon the young girl's face—indeed, she did not attempt to conceal her gratification.

"The house is quite empty, Dick," said Tom Davis, picking up his pipe off the table where he had deposited it, "so you needn't fear being overheard."

"Where's the missus?"

"Well, she's summot poorly, thankye, and has gone up to bed. It ain't nothing serious, you know."

"That's all right then. And now, Tom, what have you got to drink?"

"Anything you like."

"Then I'll take some brandy."

"Very good. So will I. Ellen, my dear, just go to the bar."

"Yes, rather."

"Father!" repeated Dick, with some surprise. "How long has she given you that title?"

"Why, you see, Dick, it wasn't her doing at all, but mine, bless her heart!"

"Oh! indeed?"

"Ah! she's a good girl, she is, and having no children of our own, and she being an orphan, and"—

"There, I don't want so many reasons. You found it more convenient, eh?"

"And a great deal more pleasant. Ah! Dick, you don't know what a treasure she is."

"And she appreciates your kindness?"

"—— does. How anybody could be other than kind to her bange me. Here she comes."

Ellen at this moment entered.

Dick looked at her with more attention, and he felt no surprise that Tom Davis, with his huge heart overflowing with love as it was, should be fond of her. She was indeed a lovely creature.

Tom Davis bestowed upon her a look of prideful admiration as she approached, and looked up into his face with a glad smile.

"Upon my word," said Dick, "I am glad to see you looking so well and happy! I wonder at it, too."

"Why?" she asked, wonderingly,

"Why?" repeated Dick, "because I know what a domestic tyrant he is."

"Me?" said Davis, aghast. "Me a domestic tyrant? Well, that is good."

"You are joking," said Ellen. "There is nothing of the tyrant about him, I am sure."

"Not a bit of it! But come, Dick, what brings you here? This is something more than a chance call, I know."

"It is," said Dick. "I had a motive in coming here, I confess."

"What is it?"

"You shall hear. My comrade Tom King is a prisoner."

"God bless me! You don't say so?"

"Is it possible you have not heard of it?"

"This is the first news I have had."

"You remember him, don't you?"

"Oh! yes!" replied Ellen and Tom Davis, in a breath.

"Well, it was chiefly my fault that he got taken prisoner," said Dick, who thereupon related all that had taken place from the time Tom was captured by the dragoons, to his own narrow escape of capture in the vestibule of the old city prison.

"And is he still there?" asked Ellen.

Both listened with the utmost eagerness to the startling narrative which Dick related in simple yet forcible words.

"He is," said Dick, "but he won't be for long. I have sworn to set him free, and I will keep my oath in spite of every obstacle!"

There was a silence for a moment, for Dick had spoken in rather an emphatic tone of voice.

Tom Davis, who was standing with his back leaning against the mantelpiece smoking his pipe, poured out another glass.

"Well," he said, as he held it to his lips, "I've heard you say you'd do a good many things that I should have thought impossible, but nevertheless you've done 'em, which makes me think you'll do this."

"I shall!"

"It won't be an easy job."

"I know that," said Dick, "and I know as well that I cannot do it unaided, so I have ridden over here to-night to know whether you will give me your assistance?"

CHAPTER CXII.

DICK TURPIN IS ALARMED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE HORSEMEN AT THE INN.

"WILL I?" asked Tom Davis, with a sudden animation in his voice. "You know I will! Only just say the word, and it's done!"

"Thanks, Tommy, my friend! I knew I could rely upon you."

"And now what is it you want me to do? We may as well talk it over before we go to bed."

"Certainly. I will not keep you long. Do you wish to stay, Ellen?"

"May I?" she asked, timidly.

"Nay, that is not it. Which would you rather do?"

"Stay here, unless you have an objection."

"No, I have none. You may be able to assist us, and I know you are to be trusted."

"Trusted?" said Tom Davis. "Of course she is to be trusted, and I should like to hear anyone say that she wasn't!"

"Really," said Dick, "if you go on in that way you'll spoil her altogether."

"Not a bit of it! She's too good to spoil, she is."

Dick could not help smiling at the enthusiasm the worthy old landlady displayed.

"Well, let us to business. You will see at once that after the very narrow escape I had, it would be something

skin to rashness for me to attempt to have another interview with Tom."

"It would."

"But there is a great necessity that we should be in communication with each other, so that I should be able to assist him."

"Just so."

"In fact, without it, I don't see how it is to be done."

"Nor I. But I suppose the upshot of the affair is just this, you want me to go and see him."

"Exactly, my friend, exactly. Mind you, I don't want to compromise you in any way by asking you to attempt to smuggle tools into him; that has been done already. All I want you to do is to visit him occasionally, and carry messages between us."

"Then, if that's all, Dick, I'll do it with all the pleasure in life."

"Hurrah!"

"You are pleased."

"I believe you! I am glad indeed I have got your consent. More glad than I could easily express!"

"Well, all I can say is, you are heartily welcome."

"I knew there would be no harm in asking you such a thing."

"Not a bit!"

"There are so many advantages."

"As how?"

"I will explain."

"I am all attention. Fill up your glass, Dick! You don't drink!"

"No, I am too much interested in the matter that is going forward."

"I daresay."

"However, old Matthew—you know old Matthew?"

"Rather, I should think, seeing he is some kin to my wife!"

"Oh! indeed, I was not aware."

"Yes; but go on. What were you going to say about old Matthew?"

"Why, that he would only have been too glad of the chance to go, only, you see, he is so well known to the prison authorities."

"I suppose he is."

"Some or other of them are sure to be at his house. They suspect a great deal, but they can't fix nothing on him."

"Nor never will, I think! Old Matthew is one too many for them."

"He has been hitherto."

"Why, the old place, which they say was once a gentleman's mansion, is full of odd nooks and corners that no one knows anything about, except the landlord himself."

"So I have heard. Well, as I say, he would go gladly enough to see Tom, but"—

"But you'd rather someone else."

"I would, and that's the truth."

"And so you asked me?"

"As being the only person I could rely upon. You are known to few, if any, of the Newgate officials, and for that reason you would be able to go in your own proper character. You need not disguise yourself, I mean."

"Just so."

"That will be the great thing. After what has happened, I have no doubt someone will always be stationed in the lobby to examine everyone that comes to see him, but if you go as you are their search can result in nothing."

"That's uncommonly true."

"And you still have no objection?"

"None at all, Dick, if delivering messages is all you want me to do, though I am free to confess that if you had asked me to take him anything I should not have been quite so willing, though I don't know I should have refused."

"Still, you would rather things be as they are."

"Most certainly! Now what do you want me to do?"

"I will tell you."

"And when do you want me to go?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Very good, go on."

"You know I told you I managed, or rather old Matthew did, to convey Tom a couple of spring files."

"These, then, I hope he has been able to make good use of ere this. It is, however, a point I wish to be ascertained."

"Very good."

"Then I want you to learn what hopes he has of making his escape, and when he will be likely to accomplish it."

"Yes."

"I knew that, I would take care to be in waiting close at hand, and with a good horse for him to mount."

"I see."

"If, however, things should go adversely, and his escape cannot be effected before the sessions, tell him that I will take care to engage first-rate counsel in his defence. If he is acquitted, which is rather doubtful."

"Very doubtful, I should say."

"Well, very doubtful be it. Nevertheless, we will not omit that chance in our calculations. A clever man before now has got a prisoner acquitted when the case looked very black against him indeed."

"That's true enough."

"And I see no reason why such a thing should not be done again."

"No—no."

"If he is acquitted, then, of course, all trouble will be at an end."

"And if they release him?"

"That would follow, as a matter of course."

"Oh! dear, no. They might have several counts in the indictment, and they would be almost sure to get him convicted on one of them."

"I did not think of that."

"Or, if they don't, the judge may refuse to set him at liberty."

"Surely he would not have the power to do that?"

"I don't know. He might give orders for him to be detained until another case could be brought against him."

"Oh! no; surely, no."

"You had best take it into your calculations, I can tell you."

"I will."

"Or they might manage things in another way."

"How?"

"Set him at liberty, and then take him prisoner again. But you may make up your mind that the judge and jury will bring him in guilty."

"Then he must be set free, that's all."

"Which is much easier said than done."

"Granted. But an unflinching determination can accomplish a great deal."

"I don't dispute it. I have seen too many instances of it."

"I have never failed yet. And now I think I have told you pretty nearly everything. Do you understand?"

"I think so. In the first place, you want me to set out for Newgate to-morrow morning, and get an interview with Tom?"

"Yes."

"Learn from him what hopes he has of making his escape with the tools you have given him?"

"Quite right. Go on."

"And if he does not get free before the trial, that you will take care and employ a good counsel in his behalf?"

"Exactly. Be sure you tell him of the narrow escape I had, and what madness it would be on my part to attempt to see him."

"He won't be so unreasonable as to expect you, I should think."

"Tell him not to be down-hearted, but that all will go well."

"I hope it will."

"So do I."

"You have grown much attached to him."

"I have. He is a brave, noble-hearted fellow, and such one as you very rarely meet."

"Well, Dick, let me tell you this. You carry things off very well, and make light of danger, and all that sort of thing; but, nevertheless, there is no disguising the fact that he is in a very ticklish position, indeed. The authorities have been rather energetic lately, and you may depend they will do all in their power to hang him."

"They shall be balked, Tom; they shall be bled; who is his?"

There was a sudden trampling of horses' hoofs outside the door, and then an imperious summons for admission was given at the door.

"Danger!" said Tom Davis.

Dick coolly reloaded and primed his pistols.

CHAPTER CXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE AN UNPARALLELED ADVENTURE.

It is sorely against our inclination to interrupt the course of events, but, as the old proverb, says, "Necessity knows no law."

We then repair to that pleasant leafy lane where we left Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

Their search for the persons who had played such a trick upon them had been arrested.

A strange sound came to their ears.

What it was, neither of them could divine.

Naturally enough they connected it with the two persons of whom they were in quest.

Whether they were right in doing this can only be discovered by succeeding events.

"That is a very peculiar sound, Jack," said Claude.

"What can it be, think you?"

"That is beyond my comprehension. Hark! there it comes again!"

The horses, too, evidently heard it, and moved uneasily.

"This is very extraordinary. What sound can it be? I can liken it to nothing."

"It is nothing human, I am confident," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but let it be what it may, I will not leave this place without making the attempt at least to find out what it is."

"That is a bold resolution after such an assertion as the one you have just made."

"Do you think so?"

"You say it is not human."

"That is my belief."

"Then do you insinuate that it is something supernatural?"

"By no means, Claude—by no means. Good heavens! how horrible!"

It was the sudden repetition of the mysterious sound which had caused this ejaculation.

This time it came to their ears with greater loudness and distinctness.

"That is a cry of some one in some mortal agony or grief," said Claude, "though what lips could give utterance to it, I am at a loss to conceive."

"There is but one way to resolve our doubts, and that is to direct our steps in the direction whence it comes."

"But can you tell where that is?"

"Not precisely, but it comes from somewhere on our right."

"So I fancy, and it is scarcely likely we should be both mistaken in its locality."

"What is it over the hedge?"

"A wood or copse or something of that sort, I take it. The trees grow very thickly together."

"Stop, then. This makes it likely that we are right. Now, Claude, my friend, just turn all your attention to listening, and I will do the same. Being in expectation of the sound we shall not be surprised when we hear it, which will better enable us to fix on the precise spot from whence it comes."

"What would you do then?"

"Having ascertained it, go as straight in that direction as we can."

"Agreed. I am quite silent. Let us listen."

They did so.

But for a long time without result.

Still, from the periodic manner in which the cry had hitherto reached them, they felt almost certain if they waited long enough they would hear it repeated.

In this expectation they were not deceived.

Moanfully—wailingly—it rose again on the night air.

"That is conclusive," said Jack, as it completely died away. "Come! I think I can take you direct to the spot."

"I think I could do the same," said Duval; "so between us I hope we shall be successful in our search."

"Over the paling, then, we must get in the first place."

"I know it, but it will be awkward. There seems no safe place for a horse to alight, and, not only that, we do not yet know what capabilities they may have for taking such a leap."

"You think the best course, then, will be to follow the palisade until we reach either a gate or some place where it would be easier to effect an entrance?"

"Exactly."

"The only misfortune is, that we shall not be so well able to go where we desire."

"Oh! I don't know. Perhaps, too, we shall hear the sound once more."

"That is extremely likely," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he trotted gently forward. "Come along."

"We ought not to waste time, that is certain."

The boundary of the little wood was very closely scrutinized by our friends, and, at a little more than a hundred yards further down the lane, they found a gap which was quite practicable.

They dismounted and led their horses over the obstruction.

On the other side they found such a thick undergrowth of brake and gorse, and the trees themselves with so little space between them, that they were compelled to continue this mode of progression, for to have mounted would have been to incur a thousand perils which on foot they would escape.

The darkness was most intense, for the branches of the trees shut out almost every ray of light.

They, however, continued for a considerable distance to force their way.

At length they stopped.

"I don't like this place at all," said Claude Duval.

"It might serve very well to elude one's foes, but"—

He was silent, for the strange cry again arose.

This time it was evidently in their vicinity.

"That is what I wanted to hear," said Jack. "Now I can shape my course to a certainty."

He plunged through the dense vegetation as he spoke.

"How very mournful it was," replied Claude. "I am more than ever at a loss to think what it can be? Can you hazard any conjecture?"

"None! Never in all my experience of the cries produced by different animals have I heard anything at all approaching that."

"Do you think it comes from a living thing at all?"

"Well—yes. I can hardly conceive it emanating from a thing devoid of life."

"I am completely puzzled."

"There is one thing, and that is, I think, before we are many minutes older we shall learn what it is."

In silence now they continued their route.

The further they advanced the more impervious the wood became.

Presently they came to a dead stop.

A barrier of some prickly kind of shrubs was before them.

In height it was nothing under six feet and how far it extended laterally they had no means of judging.

But just at this moment, and as Jack was about to make some remark to Claude, the sound which had before so much alarmed them again arose, and this time it appeared to be within a few paces of where they stood.

Upon the impulse of the moment, they both drew back.

Overcoming, however, almost instantaneously this very natural action, Jack said—

"Fasten your horse to the branch of a tree, and let us break through these bushes. I am certain it was from just on the other side of them that the sound came."

As he spoke, he securely fastened his own horse by the bridle to the trunk of a young sapling.

"I am ready," said Claude. "Here goes!"

They then made a sudden dash at the compact mass of vegetation, but in vain. They could not force their way through.

"Why, it's as bad as a brick wall."

"It is a great deal worse, my friend. A brick wall we should have very little difficulty in surmounting, but this, I take it, will be a bar to our further progress."

"No," said Jack, who had withdrawn himself from the hedge. "I think we shall be able to manage it yet."

"How?"

"You see this tree here—"

"Yes, yes."

"Its branches are wide spreading, and I think if we climb up into it, we shall be able to let ourselves down on the other side."

"Oh! yes, of course we can."

The two highwaymen then set about in good earnest to ascend the tree.

One of the horses was placed so as to stand just beneath its branches, close to the trunk.

Jack took the lead, and getting first in the stirrup, then stood upright on the saddle.

By this means he attained sufficient elevation to enable him to put his head among the foliage.

To seize one of the huge arms above him, and draw himself fairly up into the tree, was the work of a moment and a matter of the greatest ease.

Claude, of course, lost no time in following him; and, having crawled along one of the branches which stretched out laterally for many feet in the direction wished for, was about to drop to the ground, when Jack put his hand upon his shoulder, and spoke in a whisper.

CHAPTER CXIV.

THE PROSECUTION OF THE ADVENTURE IN THE WOOD BRINGS DANGER TO THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN.

"STOP!" he said.

"Why?"

"Before you descend it will only be prudent to reconnoitre. If there be danger, you will fall headlong into it."

"Good," said Claude, in the same tone in which his comrade had spoken, and which could not possibly have been heard half-a-dozen feet off.

There was, however, to all appearance, nothing to call for caution.

All seemed as still as the grave.

Nevertheless, they both leaned down close to the branch, and strove to pierce the gloom beneath them.

The short time that they had been in the wood had sufficed to make them familiar with the aspect of the various objects, and though when they first entered it had seemed perfectly dark, yet now a faint sort of twilight was diffused around.

At least such there was apparently, but it arose simply from the fact that their eyes had dilated.

They were, therefore, able to see that the hedge through which they had vainly attempted to force a passage was the kind of natural boundary to a large open space, the full extent of which they could not see.

Beyond this, however, nothing met their gaze. Beneath them was some turf of a very smooth character, and unbroken by the presence of a shrub.

"All seems very quiet," said Claude, at length, "and I can see nothing unusual. Shall we drop it?"

"Yes, I think we may do so safely."

Carefully lowering themselves until they hung quite straight down from the tree, having hold of the branch with their hands only, they waited a second to steady themselves, and then let go.

The space between their feet and the ground was only about eighteen inches, so they alighted upon the soft turf without making scarcely a sound.

But they were greeted with another repetition of the sound which had excited their curiosity if not alarm.

Although in a measure prepared for such an event, the cry this time was so horrible, so unearthly, and apparently so close to them, that they could not prevent a slight ejaculation escaping them.

"Forward," said Jack, who was the first to recover himself. "Forward. Claude, and let us see what this really is."

"It is hideous."

"Speculations are of no avail. On—on."

"Be cautious—oh! be cautious."

"I will."

"You know not what hidden danger to us may lurk beneath all this."

"That is true, and caution is by no means derogatory to courage."

"On the contrary, it is an attribute of it."

While uttering these words they had both crept forward in a stooping posture.

Of course, the nearer to the centre of this singular open

space in the wood they got, the lighter it became, and in a few minutes they had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing the moon just rise above the tree-tops.

The few white, fleecy clouds that speckled the heavens, in no appreciable degree diminished the brilliancy of her light.

But it was only in a subdued fashion that her beams reached that spot in the recesses of the wood, for it was almost covered with the huge shadows of the trees.

Suddenly, however, Claude, who happened to look to his left, clutched his companion by the arm with nervous eagerness.

He did not speak; but when Jack turned round, simply pointed with his finger.

Lying upon a piece of ground, that rose almost into a hillock, was a strange-shaped, misty form.

Its proportions appeared gigantic.

There was not, however, a sufficient amount of light for them to trace its configuration with anything like accuracy.

That there was something, was a point beyond dispute.

Coupling this with the precise location from which the startling cry had come, they assumed that what they then only partially saw, was what had produced it.

Even while they gazed, a slight movement was visible about the shapeless bulk, and then they once more heard that sound which was so hideous and mournful, that it caused a strange, cold sensation about their hearts.

"What—wh—what—is it?" gasped Claude, whose eyes, as well as those of his companion, were riveted upon the object before them.

"I am no better able to form an idea than you are," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I'll very soon find out."

"Nay, pause! Don't rush into unknown danger!"

But Jack, who was bold even to recklessness, did not allow himself to be detained, but at once moved in the direction of the object, whatever it might be, which had already produced so much alarm.

As a precaution against sudden attack, Jack drew his sword, and, grasping it firmly by the hilt, held it in an attitude of defence.

Claude Duval was, as a rule, very cautious—in that respect the very opposite to Jack, but this constitutional difference fitted them all the more for being the associates of each other.

Between them they preserved a balance which was highly conducive to their safety.

Any hidden unknown danger was always looked upon by Claude with distrust, but not so Jack, and in the present instance he did what few men would have found nerve enough to do, and that was to walk straight up to the little hillock.

It was not more than fifty feet from where he stood, so he was quickly close to it.

Claude no longer hesitated or drew back, but accompanied him.

When, however, within about half-a-dozen paces the dim shadowy-looking object began to take a distinct and palpable outline.

With eyes strained to the utmost, and neck stretched forward, the two highwaymen endeavoured to trace its configuration in order to form some idea of what it was.

But in this they were in a great measure baffled.

They could tell it was an animal of some kind, but that was all.

Its size was gigantic.

Its colour one uniform dusky tint.

But the head of this extraordinary creature, the like of which they had never before seen or heard, owing to its being raised higher than the rest of the body, was what they saw with most distinctness.

It was enough, and more than enough, to appal them.

Vulpine in shape, with large bright eyes, and glistening white teeth, or rather tusks, the head was terrible in the extreme.

The mouth was half open.

Flakes of white foam speckled the shaggy hair upon its breast and paws.

The tongue lolled forth.

Its glowing eyes were fixed upon our two friends, whose position was now, beyond a doubt, one of the greatest peril.

Then, lifting up its head in the fashion a huge dog does when he is about to bark, this strange animal again gave vent to the hideous moaning cry, half-animal and half-human, which had first reached the ears of Jack and Claude.

But then they were at a distance.

Now, however, when the throat of the creature was almost within reach of their hands, had they felt inclined to stretch them out, its horror was a thousand times increased.

For nearly a minute was the extraordinary sound prolonged, and then it died away in a faint whine.

CHAPTER CXV.

JACK AND CLAUDE ARE ALARMED AT THE APPEARANCE OF THE WILD ANIMAL.

"BACK, Jack, back!" exclaimed Claude Duval. "Back, for the love of heaven! You cannot tell what powers of mischief such a creature may have. Back. Oh! back."

As he spoke he clutched his comrade by the arm, and forcibly dragged him a few paces away.

But then Jack recovered himself.

"No," he said. "Let us stand and face the danger, whatever it may be; besides, to retreat might only be to hasten our own destruction, for I have ever heard that few wild animals will venture to attack a man if he stands and faces them."

"But this is England," said Claude, "where no ferocious creatures exist."

"All the better reason, then, for standing our ground. Let us remain where we are a few minutes. Look to your right. In a few minutes the moon will be high enough in the heavens to shed her beams upon the bit of rising ground, and then we shall be better able to see what is there."

It was as Jack had said.

They waited where they stood with great anxiety.

"Look," continued Jack; "it is, I think, pretty evident the creature, be it what it may, means us no harm, for it has not moved in the least."

"It is very strange."

"Of that there cannot be a doubt; and then, besides, the cry it has just uttered was certainly not one of rage, or anger, but rather one of pain or grief."

"You make me feel ashamed of myself," said Claude, who was instantly struck by the truth of his friend's remarks.

"I should be sorry to do that. The case is an exceptional one, that is certain."

The animal remained profoundly still, but yet they could see its glittering eyes were turned full towards them.

"I am at a loss to think what it can be," said Claude, after a brief pause.

"Another minute and the moon's rays will fall upon it. We shall be able then to form a more correct estimate."

An anxious minute passed, which seemed to those who were waiting a good half-hour, and then the chastened light crept over the little hillock.

Gradually all was revealed.

An exclamation of what he saw came from the lips of Sixteen-String Jack.

It was echoed by another of a similar character from his companion.

And truly well they might.

They had supposed that the wild animal was the only thing there was upon the knoll.

But in this they were deceived.

We will relate what they did see, and we feel sure that then the reader will to the full participate in their astonishment.

Motionless, and extended on its back, was a human form.

By the dress it would seem to be a man.

The upturned face was ghastly white.

One arm was stretched out upon the grass.

Clenched tightly in the hand was a sword, upon the lower part of which the moonbeams glimmered, but the upper part was of a dark colour, and reflected none of her rays.

Crouching down over the form, with its paws placed upon its breast, was the strange creature whose cries had first led them to the spot.

They were now able to see this animal plainly.

In shape it resembled a wolf; it had the same shaggy hair—the same long fangs—the same strong, wiry legs.

But that it was not a wolf was quite apparent, as if it was, it was of a size and colour such as they had never before heard of.

Well might such an extraordinary spectacle as this enchain the faculties of both our friends, and is it to be wondered at that they stood gazing for some moments, uncertain whether what they saw was real?

Then, and very naturally, the idea rushed into their minds, that the man who lay so still upon the grass had been worsted in an encounter with the ferocious brute.

But only for a second did this hold a place in their minds. There was nothing blood-thirsty or aggressive in the animal's appearance. On the contrary, it was mournful, and it gazed upon our friends without making the least movement either of fear or anger.

The attitude of the beast was such as might have been assumed by some faithful dog who had found his master grievously wounded or dead.

Another howl came from its lips, and both the highwaymen noted with astonishment, the melancholy tone it bore.

It served to arouse them from their distraction.

Jack turned round towards Claude.

"What are we to make of this?" he said. "I confess I am fairly puzzled. Of all the extraordinary adventures I have had there has never been one in the remotest degree resembling this."

"I, too, am bewildered beyond all expression. What conclusion to come to I know not."

"The demeanour of the animal seems peaceable enough."

"It does. What can it be?"

"I have no idea."

"The resemblance to a dog is very strong."

"Yes; and yet it is most unlike. Most of all, however, do I wonder who it is that lies so stark beneath its paws."

"What shall we do? Would it be prudent, think you, to approach such a creature?"

"Certainly not prudent; for if it should take it into its head to attack us, we should stand no more chance than we should with a tiger."

"A tiger—a tiger!"

"Why do you repeat the words?"

"Because," said Claude, "of the resemblance it has to a tiger. Until you said the word, I did not think of it."

"Ha!" said Jack, "there is a wondrous likeness. Look at the coat—the suppleness of the body—and the tail!"

"Those are the points in which it resembles it, but beyond that all likeness ceases. The head and legs, if I saw them separately, I should declare to be those of a wolf."

"It is no good to speculate upon it. We shall never know what it is if we stay at once. My advice is to go close up to it. It seems harmless and peaceful enough."

"Just now, but, like the tiger, it may be treacherous."

"We must be on our guard to resist it. Surely if we are wary we can between us conquer it, if it comes to a contest, and somehow I don't much think it will."

"Let us go then. My curiosity urges me forward. I could never leave the place until I knew something further."

"Whether the man beneath its paws, and whom it seems more inclined to defend than attack, is alive or not, is the point I am most anxious to ascertain."

With slow but firm steps the two highwaymen now advanced.

They could not but be fully sensible of the immense risk they ran.

There was a probability that one, or perhaps both, of them was marching to death.

Further than fixing his gaze steadfastly upon the two approaching forms, the animal took no notice of them.

Then, when they got nearer, they found that, though its fore-paws were resting on the breast of the man, yet they were placed in such a manner as to produce no inconvenience from their weight.

This circumstance pointed pretty clearly to the fact that he was friendly, and not inimical.

At this moment the man gave a faint groan.

"He is not dead," said Jack, "but how we are to serve him I cannot exactly see."

But the creature, with a sagacity that was quite canine in its character, raised itself up, and, removing its fore-feet, from their position, came submissively to where our friends stood.

It wagged its tail slowly, and looked with a beseeching glance into their features, and then, as if to still further enlist their sympathies, uttered a faint whining cry, very different in its character to the previous one.

It was impossible for anyone to be actually alarmed at the creature, despite its looks. Its manner and attitude were inoffensive and humble in the extreme.

Then, having done this, it turned away again, and walked with a stealthy, cat-like motion towards the prostrate figure.

What it meant was clearly deducible from its actions.

At least the interpretation Jack and Claude put upon them was that it required them to follow it, and if possible render assistance to the man.

"There is some deep mystery here, Claude," said Jack. "And I should be very loath, indeed, to go away until I had unraveled it."

So saying, he, having reached the wounded man, stooped down in order to ascertain the nature of the hurts he had received.

CHAPTER CXVI.

ANOTHER AND YET MORE HORRIBLE DISCOVERY IS MADE IN THE WOOD BY CLAUDE DUVAL.

So much odd intelligence was observable in the manner in which the creature regarded Jack's motions, that all idea of danger from it was completely dispersed.

It sat itself down upon its hind legs, after the fashion of a dog, and watched everything with the closest attention.

"Speak," said Jack, for he observed the wounded man give some signs of life. "Speak, if you have strength enough to do so, and tell us who you are."

There was a convulsive twitching about the lips in response to this, but nothing more. Although partially conscious, he was too far gone to use his voice.

"Water, Claude. I must have some water. He has been wounded with a sword, or some such instrument."

"I have no idea where to find such a thing as water here, but, however, I will try."

"Do so, do so. It will be absolutely necessary to bathe the coagulated blood away, and also, by sprinkling it upon his face, restore him to consciousness."

"You are sure he is alive."

"Oh! quite."

"Then, if there is any water to be had, I will bring some, and I do not expect I shall have to go far without finding what I seek."

Claude crossed the open space, and disappeared among the trees.

Then to the surprise of both, the animal, after casting a wistful glance at Jack, followed him.

"Look out, Claude! He may mean mischief."

But nothing in the creature's manner warranted such a supposition as this. It was as docile as ever.

Claude Duval, however, took the precaution of standing on one side until it passed him.

"Who knows?" he said, as he followed it among the trees. "It may be possessed of some instinct that will enable it to go to where the nearest water is to be found."

This idea was probable enough.

But scarcely had it gone ten yards, than it paused and uttered an angry snarl.

There could be no mistaking the signification of the sound.

Claude threw back a step or two.

Then, on looking closely on the ground, he saw some object upon which the animal had pounced.

He heard the gnashing of teeth and the laceration of flesh.

The shot he gave had the effect of very quickly bringing Jack to his side.

"What is amiss?" he said, in great alarm. "Oh! you are safe?"

"Quite! But look at this wild animal, here. It has got something making a meal of."

But it had stopped that operation on the approach of Jack.

"Can you see what it is?"

"No! Do not go too close."

"I don't think, my friend, that it means us any harm. If it did, it would have demonstrated itself before this."

"Well, I must say, throughout it has behaved more like a dog than a wild animal."

"Good heavens!" said Jack, who had, while Claude spoke, stooped down to see what it was. "This is"—

"What?—oh! what?"

"Another man."

"Impossible."

"It is true, nevertheless. Look, Duval. He is shockingly mangled, and, of course, quite dead."

In obedience to these words Claude looked down, and there he saw what was clearly a man's body, but so frightfully disfigured, that it presented little more than the appearance of a mass of flesh.

"How horrible!" he said.

"The mystery thickens," remarked Jack. "What we have seen to-night is the result of some strange events of more than common interest."

"I would give the world to know them."

"I confess myself full of curiosity about it. You may, however, rely upon one thing."

"What is it?"

"That the strange creature we have seen is the preserver of one, and the destroyer of the other."

"What I cannot understand is its behaviour towards us."

"It evidently is possessed of sufficient intelligence to be aware that we are friends—not enemies."

"It looks like it."

"Rely upon it, that is the correct solution of one part of the affair. But come, we can do no good here. Let us return to the other."

"But the water."

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten. Listen. Can you hear the sound of a water-course? I fancy I did just then."

They listened intently, and then there came faintly to their ears, that rushing sound produced by running water.

They had little difficulty in determining its locality, and they made direct towards it.

The wolfish-looking animal growled, and then turning away, retraced its steps towards the open space.

"He has gone back to his master, for I suppose such he is. Indeed, the only reasonable conclusion I can come to is, that it is some foreign animal which has been partially tamed."

On reaching the water, which was but a little stream, the two highwaymen filled their hats with the pure fluid, and then returned.

The dismal cry which they had first heard in the lane again saluted their ears.

"That is his way of asking for assistance, I suppose, Jack."

"No doubt; and it has proved effectual."

"So it has—so it has."

Two minutes afterwards they reached the open space. The moon now fully lighted it up, and they were able to see its extent, which probably was little more than a couple of acres.

Simultaneously they directed their gaze to the little hillock, and there, occupying precisely the same position as he had at first, was the animal for which our friends had been unable to find a name.

On their approach it came towards them with every manifestation of pleasure of which it seemed capable.

"He's uncommonly sensible, Jack, to be sure."

"He is. Now for his master."

Sixteen-String Jack dipped his hand into one of the hats, and sprinkled a few drops of water upon the man's face.

A gasping sob was the result.

A repetition of this treatment caused him to open his eyes and start convulsively, while a faint groan came from his lips.

The animal did not seem to approve of this, and he looked threateningly at Jack, who, however, was too much occupied to notice it.

"Speak" he said. "What has happened? I am a friend."

"Friend—friend?"

"Give him a little more water," said Duval.

The hat now was nearly empty, so Jack threw what there was in it into his face.

The effect was rather unlooked for.

Uttering a dreadful shriek, that echoed and re-echoed among the trees, the wounded man sprang to a sitting posture.

It was followed by a howl from the creature, but, as it saw Jack evidently had no sinister designs, he made no further display of his dissatisfaction.

But it made Jack alive to his danger.

Then the resuscitated man, after passing his hand over his face, spoke.

It was only one word, twice repeated.

"Koolah! Koolah!"

His voice was faint, but the words reached the animal's ears, and it crouched down near him and licked his hand.

From this it would appear, "Koolah" was the name of the strange creature.

"Who are you?" asked Jack again. "I tell you we are friends, who have found you here desperately wounded."

"Ah!" said the owner of Koolah, as his memory suddenly came back to him. "I recollect all now."

He still retained his sword in his grasp, and using it as a support, strove to raise himself to his feet.

Jack perceiving this, assisted him.

When he thus assumed an upright position, the two highwaymen were better able to observe his general appearance.

He was a tall and well-proportioned man, with dark brown curly hair.

His costume was that of a naval officer, and the epaulettes upon his shoulders shone faintly in the moonlight.

He had received a wound from some sharp instrument in his back, and in consequence of the change of position hæmorrhage recommenced.

He leaned heavily upon his sword.

"I have had an atrocious attempt made upon my life," he said, "but the villain who stabbed me did not escape without a slight punishment at my hands."

He lifted his sword as though to examine its blade, but as soon as he deprived himself of this support he staggered, and would have fallen, had not Jack and Claude seized him by his arms.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE LIEUTENANT GIVES SOME EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUCCOURED HIM.

"THANKS—thanks!" he gasped faintly. "It was a close touch. I must have bled a great deal, which I suppose has caused this unaccustomed weakness. Let me sit a little while."

"If you will allow me," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I have a knowledge of surgery so far as it relates to wounds, and I can dress and bind up your wounds, which will make you feel much better."

"You will be doing me a real service," he said, patting Koolah's neck, "perhaps saving my life."

There still remained sufficient water in Claude's hat to enable him to wash the blood from the wound, which was a ghastly one; and then he extemporized some bandages, and bound it up.

"I can feel you have done that skilfully," said the stranger. "You must have had long practice."

"I have had some experience, it is true; but to return to yourself."

"What would you say?"

"I am glad you speak so much better."

"I already feel the benefit of your treatment, and am, no doubt, rapidly recovering. All that ailed me was the loss of blood, I think, and now that is stopped, I shall soon be better."

"Just so. You must know that myself and my friend, while passing along a lane, at some little distance from here, heard a most unearthly sound, which so excited our curiosity, that, in spite of all obstacles, we made our way thither."

"Then it is to Koolah that I owe your presence, and, consequently, my life?"

"Yes, if that is the name of the strange creature you have with you. You may judge of our astonishment when we saw so formidable a looking animal crouching over an insensible human form. Pray what is it? We are quite at a loss upon the point."

"As you see by my dress, I am a lieutenant in the navy, and, during a stay which I made in the Persian Gulf, I bought this creature, then a newly-born cub, from one of the natives, who assured me it was the offspring of one he had had for some time in his possession, and that it would, when it grew up, resemble, in most respects, a dog of unusual size. In its wild state the animal is a most ferocious brute, and as much dreaded as the tiger."

"Indeed, but what is it? It resembles the tiger in some respects, and in others the dog or wolf."

"You are right. That is just what it is. I forget the hideous name the Persians have for them, but I know the corresponding words in English are tiger-wolf."

"Indeed. How singular?"

"The name no doubt is derived from the circumstance of its partaking of the nature of both those animals. I call him Koolah, because that is the name of the man of whom I bought him."

At the pronunciation of the word, the tiger-wolf again caressed his master.

"You see he is quite tamed."

"I am astonished," said Jack.

"And I too," added Claude Duval.

"He is, indeed, an invaluable defender."

"How comes it, then, that you were wounded? And it seems strange for you to be in this place at all, so far removed as it is from all human habitations."

A troubled look crossed the features of the lieutenant.

"You are discomposed," said Jack; "but I naturally feel curious to know this strange affair, more especially as"

Jack was going to speak of the frightful sight he had seen among the trees, but he checked himself.

"It is only natural that you should. I am strangely perplexed. Help me to rise, sir, if you will; I fancy I shall be better when erect."

Sixteen-String Jack assisted him to his feet.

"It is only fitting that I should give you an account of these peculiar circumstances; besides which, you will perhaps assist me in coming to a correct conclusion upon the points which baffle me."

"We shall be glad," replied Jack "if we are able to achieve such a result."

"I will then tell you briefly that I landed at Portsmouth three days ago, and made my way here. I arrived a little before sunset. You must also know that this is a trying place, where I had an assignment to meet one who—who—no matter—no matter!"

Jack bowed.

The young seaman was much agitated, but, recovering himself, he resumed—

"You will understand it was a lady I came to meet. Anticipating no evil, and fearing to terrify her by the appearance of my companion, I tied him to a tree close by, and then repaired to the hillock. I stood there waiting for her to make her appearance, when I suddenly became conscious that there was some one behind me. It was not that I heard or saw anything, but a strange, shuddering sensation made me aware of the fact."

"Before, however, I had time to turn, I felt a cold substance penetrate my back. I knew I had been stabbed—assassinated—and I turned with the quickness of lightning. I saw a man, and with my last strength I wounded him with my sword, and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall beside me. After that I remember nothing until you restored me to life."

It was with the most breathless interest that our friends listened to this narrative.

"But there was no one beside you when we came except Koolah."

"He must have broken from the cove with which I bound him to the tree, and my assassin, who, perhaps, after all, was only slightly wounded, has crawled away."

"Not far, though!"

"What do you mean? Have you found him?"

"That is more than I can precisely take upon my



[SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, CLAUDE, AND THE LIEUTENANT VIEWING THE BODY OF STEPHEN MURRAY.]

say; but guided by Koolah, as you call him, we found among the trees the horribly mutilated body of a man."

"It is he, then; and I am avenged! Lead me to where he lies, in order that I may look at him, and, if possible, recognise my assailant!"

"Do you not know him, then?"

"Alas! no. What am I to think of all this?—Why—oh! why does she not come?"

These words were spoken to himself more than to our friends, but they nevertheless heard them.

"If you are strong enough," said Jack, "follow me, and I will take you to where we found the horrible sight."

"Lead on, I will follow! My wound, although at first I feared it was a fatal one, cannot be so. I get stronger and better every instant."

Koolah, when he saw they were about to move, rose from his crouching posture, and with a slow, cat-like walk, preceded them.

They had only to follow him to find the object which they sought.

As before, he sprang upon the body with a growl of anger, and commenced tearing it afresh.

But a word from his master was sufficient to withdraw him from the object of his hatred; and then the young sailor looked closely at it in order to recognise, if possible, his dastard foe.

From the exclamation he uttered he seemed to do so.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "it is Katharine's guardian! What am I to think of this? My brain is in a whirl!"

"And well it may be, sir. But you have not told us all."

"But I will do so, and that at once. Perhaps you will be able to assist me to arrive at some conclusion, for I feel as if I was going mad!"

"You must curb your agitation as much as possible, or in the state you are now in, it may be productive of the worst results."

"You are right! I will strive to do so."

"I confess I feel no ordinary amount of curiosity in this matter, and therefore naturally look for it being gratified;

but independently of myself, I think a calm recital of all the circumstances will do much to soothe your mind.

"It may be. I do not know you to whom I am going to make this confidence; but you have saved my life: that is sufficient. Besides which, I consider you entitled to an explanation—in which, though I say it, there is nothing of which I have cause to be ashamed."

"You would not be the true sailor I take you to be if such proved the case."

"You flatter! However, I am a lieutenant on board His Majesty's ship *Endeavour* man-of-war, which vessel now lies at anchor in Plymouth Sound. My name is Rupert Thrustans."

"On leaving the ship, I made my way direct to this place. I ought to have told you that this wood, or burst, as they always call it, forms a part of the possessions of a young girl—an orphan—to whom, in fine, as you surmise, I am betrothed. As she was a mere child when her father died, he appointed an intimate and dear friend of his as guardian. His name was Stephen Murray."

CHAPTER CXVIII.

LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS RELATES A STARTLING NARRATIVE TO OUR FRIENDS.

DECIDEDLY the interest attaching itself to the narrative of the young sailor, Lieutenant Thrustans, was on the increase, and when he spoke of the guardian, they both involuntarily turned their gaze upon the mangled corpse at their feet.

"Yes," continued the lieutenant, as he observed the action, "he is there; that is what puzzles me! I will continue."

"From boyhood had the friendship between Stephen Murray and the father of my betrothed subsisted, and the feeling appeared to intensify itself as years passed by; so when he died there was nothing surprising in the fact that he should constitute him guardian of his daughter and her estates."

"But," interrupted Jack, "have you and this guardian been enemies?"

"No; on the contrary, friends."

"Then why did he make so cowardly an attempt upon your life?"

"Heaven only knows! I am unable to find a motive. It is surely he, and yet I can scarcely credit the avowal of my own eyes."

"Can he have mistaken you for some one else?"

"Hardly, I should think, for the burst is but little frequented, and avoided after dark. But stay! How could he know I should be here, and why has Katharine not come?"

"You are now asking questions to which we are unable to reply."

"Pardon me, my friends, I am confused, dizzy, and the more I think over this night's occurrences the more does my bewilderment increase."

"I can easily understand that. But will you excuse me if I ask you a question?"

"Certainly! speak freely, and without reserve."

"Perhaps I shall be able to assist you in unravelling the affair. Believe me, it is from no objectless curiosity that I ask."

"I believe it. Pray speak."

"The question I was going to ask was this—What means did you adopt to make Katharine—if such is her name—aware of your intention to meet her to-night at this place?"

The young lieutenant was silent.

"If," said Jack, "the question I have just asked involves something which you would rather keep in your own breast, think no more of it, or, rather, that it had never been asked."

"No—no! I have told you all so far, and I will tell you the rest. The hesitation which I displayed you will find to be a natural enough feeling."

Jack merely bowed assent.

"The easiest plan," said Lieutenant Thrustans, "if not the shortest, will be to begin with the beginning. I am inclined to do so, because I think it probable you will be able to show me out of my present horrible perplexity, and for you to have a fair chance of doing this I should assuredly tell you all."

"You are yet weak," said Jack; "before you begin

this narration, suppose we return to the little hillock where we found you; there you will be able to find a seat and rest yourself."

"I will. Come, Koolah."

He turned as he spoke, accompanied by our two friends, who were positively burning with curiosity to get at the termination of this strange adventure.

The fierce animal to which he undor'tedly on the present occasion was indebted for his life, after giving an angry glance at the bleeding body of Stephen Murray, followed in his footsteps.

Upon reaching the little grassy knoll, all three sat down. In the pale moonlight they looked picturesque in the extreme.

Lieutenant Thrustans was seated with our friends one on either side of him.

He began his story rather abruptly.

"When her father died, Katharine had only just passed her sixteenth birthday. I was then nineteen."

"An attachment sprung up between us,—a fervent and unchanging one on my part."

"Although not her equal in point of wealth, for her father was the richest man in the county, yet I was so in birth and position. The property we had once possessed had dwindled down, and I, an only son, found it necessary to seek some avocation."

"In doing this I followed the bent of my own inclination. I was always passionately fond of the sea, and the desire to visit other countries was one of the earliest I can remember having."

"My father possessed sufficient interest to purchase me a commission on board one of the best ships in the service."

"It was just as these arrangements were completed that Mr. Hayward died."

"I ought to tell you that he knew nothing of the attachment existing between his daughter and myself, nor did he in any way show that he had the least suspicion of it."

"As I said, Stephen Murray, Mr. Hayward's staunchest and oldest friend, who has to-night met with so terrible a fate, was appointed Katharine's guardian, who, by her father's death, became the greatest heiress in the county, though of course she would not come into actual possession of her wealth until the attainment of her majority."

"Grief for her father's death, which was sudden and unexpected, drove for some time all other considerations from her mind."

"Luckily there was yet a month before the *Endeavour* sailed, or it is probable we should have separated without having the explanation I intended."

"I deferred it until the night before my departure."

"We met here upon this very hillock, in the burst upon which we are now sitting. The interview was a long and painful one for both."

"She had become to a great extent reconciled to her loss, and so was able to speak with some degree of calmness and dispassion."

"What I urged upon her was this."

"She was young—very young. There was a brilliant future in prospective for her."

"My own was most uncertain, though, of course, I looked forward with every confidence to promotion."

"That she loved me then passionately, truly, with all the fervour of a first devotion, I had no doubt; but then, as I have said, she was young. Circumstances might arise which would induce a change in her affections."

"I did not say that such would prove the case; and although she might not then believe that a change in her sentiments could take place, yet there was a probability of it, judging from what had happened before to others."

"The avowal of a reciprocation of the love I bore for her filled me with happiness; and however much I might have desired it in my heart, I would not suffer her to bind herself to me by any vows, though that circumstance did not prevent my pledging my love to her."

"I don't know whether I have succeeded in making you comprehend me, but I did with her. I wished to leave her free, unfettered, and at liberty to use her own discretion, but to believe that I should ever be faithful to her through all mutations of chance and change, and if, when I returned from my first cruise, which would be at the very least twi-

altered, I would consent to the formation of an engagement between us.

"In brief, it was with the following understanding that we parted. On my return I was to forward a letter to her, naming the day I should be here, and that at moon-rise on that night or evening I should be here and wait. If she was true, she would come and meet me; if she had altered, I should understand her absence. Is all this quite clear to you?"

"Perfectly," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and I can only say that your conduct in the affair cannot be sufficiently commended."

The young lieutenant bowed.

"I merely acted in the manner my conscience dictated and approved."

"Say, rather, in a manner which the high sense of honour prompted. Is not that your opinion, Claude?"

"It is," said Duval; "few, I think, would have been noble-minded enough to have carried out such a resolve, and I rejoice at the strange and unparalleled succession of events which has placed me in a position to render so true a gentleman a service."

The lieutenant bowed again, and though his heart told him that these encomiums were merited, yet with that sensitiveness which is ever the accompaniment of a disposition such as his was, he shrank from hearing them.

"Enough! enough!" he said; "though I should be guilty of a rudeness were I not to express my pleasure at finding you entertain so good an opinion of me. And now to conclude my story, for I have little more to tell. My presence here is sufficient proof of my sincerity. Never during the three years I have been absent from England have I ceased to think of her—to cherish her image in my heart. The hope that I should find her constant, and the portrayal of a happy future, has served to cheat many a long watch on the lonely ocean of its tediousness. I was full of impatience from the moment we commenced our return voyage, and though we were favoured to an unprecedented extent with fair weather, and consequently making great speed, yet to me our progress seemed snail-like in the extreme."

"As soon as I landed, my first act was to write, and then, with as little loss of time as possible, repair hither. The rest you know. I came hither at the appointed time and waited. While so doing, I was dastardly stabbed by some one who stole behind me unawares. That it was Katharine's guardian, Stephen Murray, who has been overtaken by a retribution, which I think just, who thus acted the bravo's part, there cannot be a reasonable doubt. The only thing that puzzles me is to find his motive. There I am quite at a loss."

Lieutenant Thrustans, as he thus concluded his strange story, let his head fall between his hands, and appeared to give himself up, either to thought or to grief, but which of the two it was, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval were unable to determine.

CHAPTER CXIX.

THE BLOOD-STAINED LETTER BEARS WITNESS TO THE VILLAINY OF KATHARINE'S GUARDIAN.

RESPECT for the young and noble-minded seamen kept the two highwaymen silent, and, during the pause which now ensued, they occupied themselves with the reflections which such a narrative could not fail to call forth.

There was room enough for conjecture and surmise in all that they had heard.

The silence continued for full ten minutes, and, probably, had been continued much longer, had not Koolah, by uttering a faint whine, and licking his hands, aroused Lieutenant Thrustans from his abstraction.

He had become quite unconscious of the presence of our two friends.

"Pardon me," he said. "I—I—was thinking of you see—or striving to think—and so"—

"No apologies are needed, sir," replied Jack. "I can understand your silence. There is much to perplex, and much matter for speculation in what you have told us."

"There is—there is. Surely she cannot have so changed as to—but no—I will not do her that injustice. Such a thought ought never to have entered my mind. It was unworthy of me."

"To me the affair seems very simple," said Claude

Duval, who had listened to the whole with the utmost attention.

"How so, sir?" said the lieutenant. "If you have anything plausible, in the shape of an explanation, I pray you let me hear it."

"I do not for a moment pretend I am right; but I have my own idea of the matter."

"Speak then, sir. If you can pilot me out of all the doubts that harass me, I shall be for ever grateful to you."

"Then tell me, did I understand you to say, that you had every reason to believe that Mr. Hayward was ignorant of the love existing between you and his daughter?"

"Yes. Such is my belief."

"Was Mr. Murray, the guardian, also ignorant of it?"

"That is more than I can answer. I can only say that I never breathed a word to him upon the subject, nor do I think he ever saw anything to cause him to suspect it."

"Indeed. Then, sir, you are inclined to the opinion that he knew nothing of it previous to or at the time of your departure?"

"I am."

"You may depend, then, this is the state of the case. By some means or other he has become acquainted with the fact. It may be, that the lady herself has avowed it to him."

"It is quite possible. But then, why should he have acted as he has?"

"That is quite another matter. One thing I think is very evident, and that is, you have been very much mistaken in the character of Mr. Murray. Could you have ever deemed him base enough to stoop to assassination?"

"Never."

"But there is every proof that he did."

"There is, and yet I can scarce believe it. No one bore a better name than he did. All who knew him looked up to and respected him."

"It is strange, but it is not the first time that a person has succeeded in blinding others as to his real character."

"True, true."

"However, I think we may feel sure that if you are only willing we can set at rest all doubts whether it really was Mr. Murray who made the attack upon your life."

"I have already identified the mangled corpse among the trees yonder as being his."

"I know you have, but that is not it. You said that you were in time to turn round and wound your assailant? Now, if the assailant was Mr. Murray, we shall, despite the rough treatment he has received from Koolah, find the marks of a wound upon him?"

"We shall."

"This point, then, once set at rest," said Claude, "I think the rest of the affair as plain as daylight."

"Let us go," said the lieutenant, rising to his feet.

"Let us go. We can soon ascertain if it is so."

"We can, we can."

All three then again repaired to the spot where the corpse lay. Koolah, as before, closely following in his master's footsteps.

As before, too, he uttered the ominous growl, and was about to spring upon his victim; but a word from the gallant sailor was sufficient to restrain him, and he shrank submissively to the earth.

Claude Duval, as he had proposed the measure, now thought it his duty to carry it out. So, overcoming a natural repugnance, he stooped down to examine the body.

The altitude where the moon had by this time attained permitted her beams to dissipate the darkness that hung about that unbragous spot.

Claude was able to see what he was about.

The sight was a sickening and revolting one.

The man's apparel was torn in many places, and soaked in blood.

As well as he could he removed it, or rather such portions of it as were rendered necessary by his purpose.

But even that was not enough, as Jack saw, so simply saying he would be back in a moment, he ran to the little stream and filled his hat with water.

By the time he returned, Claude had finished his disagreeable task of baring the body of the dead.

"Thanks," he said, as his comrade handed him the water; "the very thing of which I stood in need, for until the clots of blood are washed away from the wounds, it

will be impossible to tell which have been inflicted by the teeth of Koolah."

Lieutenant Thrustans looked on with the greatest interest and curiosity.

By the aid of the water, Claude soon removed the blood. "Sir," he said, "there is no doubt now. Mr. Murray who lies here was your would-be assassinator. Look, here is the mark where the sword entered his right side."

Jack and the lieutenant stooped down to satisfy themselves of the truth of what Claude said, and there they saw what was palpably a sword, and not a tooth-wound, just under the short ribs.

"It is enough," said the young officer. "I am satisfied. All lingerings of doubt are now dispelled."

"They are unquestionably, I think," said Claude Duval. "We need not have taken so much trouble, though, if we had only given it a thought. He could not have reached the place without leaving a trail of blood, and if we had followed that from the hillock it would have been conclusive."

"It would, but yet after all not so satisfactory. Doubt is now impossible. It would, however, have saved you a disagreeable job."

"That does not signify at all. The main thing was to be perfectly satisfied, and I may say we are now."

"Yes, yes. Let us leave this place."

"I am willing," said Claude, "but I have not yet done."

You say you wrote a letter to Miss Hayward?"

"I did."

"Is this it?"

Claude held up a crumpled, blood-stained sheet of paper.

"Oh, heavens!" said the lieutenant, as he snatched the paper, and looked at it. The moon's light was sufficiently powerful for him to assure himself that it was the letter he had sent. "What can be the meaning of this? Where did you find it?"

"I took it from the breast-pocket of the guardian. This is more positive proof."

"I see it all now," said the officer; "I see it all."

"Yes. Your letter, you may depend, never reached the hands for which it was intended. I know not what his motives may have been, but that Mr. Murray intercepted it is certain. Why he should not wish you to meet his ward, or why he should make the attempt he did upon your life, we have yet to learn; but, having ascertained this much, it will be easy to arrive at the remainder."

"There is a little circumstance," said Sixteen-String Jack, "deserving, I think, of consideration."

"What is it?"

"Supposing that Miss Hayward had not kept her appointment with you, what should you have done?"

"I cannot say—I know not."

"You would have gone?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, such being the case, why did Mr. Murray attempt your life? All he could want, one would think, would be to ensure your absence. It appears to me this could have been done without staining his hands with blood, and running the risk of being ultimately charged with the murder."

There was a silence.

This little circumstance had the effect of destroying Claude's hypothesis.

But it was only for a moment.

"No, stop," he said, "that all depends upon the amount of information contained in the letter. Did you say anything of the terms upon which you had agreed to meet."

"No. I would read you the letter, but it is not light enough. However, I will tell you its contents. I merely asked her, if her love was unchanged, to meet me to-night at moonrise, according to agreement, upon Gnome-hillock, in the hush."

"And that was all?"

"All."

"Then we could have known nothing of your intention to depart. Rely upon it, circumstances have so fallen out as to tempt him to commit the crime he so nearly succeeded in. The spot is a lone one, little frequented?"

"Yes; superstition has cast her shadow upon the place, and it is scarcely if ever visited."

"Precisely: and so he thought you might remain there

undiscovered, until decay had made such progress as to have obliterated not only your features, but the crime."

"It is awful. I can scarcely bring myself to credit the existence of so much guilt."

"I confess it is hard to do so, but there is no length to which a man will not go when under the domination of a powerful passion. But from all these dreadful circumstances I think it will be easy for you to derive hope and joy. I mean that she whom you love with so rare a devotion is true to you, or her guardian would never have attempted to put you out of the way."

CHAPTER CXX.

OLD STEVENS, THE STEWARD, MAKES A TERRIBLE REVELATION TO LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS.

THERE was so much truth in this remark, that Lieutenant Thrustans became at once impressed with the belief that that was indeed the true solution of the events which had taken place.

"Katharine," he said. "I will go to her at once. It is from her that I shall learn more of this mysterious and terrible affair."

"I should have proposed that as the next step for you to take," said Claude Duval. "We may reasonably presume that the letter now in your hands was never seen by her, and, therefore, she could know nothing of the appointment."

"Certainly not. Gentlemen, you are perfect strangers to me, as I am to you, but you have acted as friends only could. My brain was confused. I could not separate events. You having clearer minds have enabled me to come to a correct conclusion. You have rekindled hope. For all this I can never be sufficiently grateful. I feel that I cannot further trespass upon your kindness."

"If there is anything further that we can do to serve you," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "I can assure you it will be done with the greatest readiness. We are honoured by your acquaintance—should be proud to be considered your friends. Our time is our own, we have no particular engagement; and, therefore, I hope you will not be afraid to speak freely to us."

"I was then," said the young lieutenant, "about to ask you if you would finish what you have begun by accompanying me to 'The Home,' for that is the name of the house in which Miss Hayward dwells. It is but a short distance from here."

"We shall only be too glad. You will excuse me for saying, that all you have said, and all that has taken place, has filled us with interest and curiosity. I should, above all things, like to learn the sequel."

"Come with me, then. Your presence is the thing I most desire. Your intellects are more logical than my own. I confess I am about the worst in the world to find my way out a difficulty. Your friend, there, seems particularly gifted in that way."

He pointed to Claude as he spoke, who made a very low bow in reply.

"I ought before this to have told you our names," said Jack, with a glance at Claude, which he fully understood, "but the fact is, the things that have happened drove all ceremony out of my head. However, it is not too late to repair the omission. My friend's name is Engleheart—my own, Campbell. We have just returned from France, and are on our way to London."

The lieutenant bowed courteously in acknowledgment, and then he said,—

"They are two names which will be always remembered by me with the greatest pleasure; and now, gentlemen, are you ready to accompany me?"

"Quite. Yet stay. We have left our horses in the thicket yonder, for we could not force a passage through it. Doubtless you, by your knowledge of the spot, will be able to show us a path by which we can lead them hither."

"Certainly I can, if you will show me where they are."

Both our friends had been very careful to note the exact place where they had left the horses, and they pointed it out to their companion, who, turning to the left, led the way by a rather circuitous route to the tree to which they had been tethered.

With their bridles over their arms, or they would not mount while the officer was on foot, they followed

along a narrow pathway, until at last they emerged from the dark on the side opposite to that on which our friend entered it.

A few paces, and upon the top of a slight eminence, was one of those picturesque old Elizabethan mansions, which always lend so much beauty to an English landscape.

It was surrounded by spacious grounds, in the highest state of cultivation, which were by the pale moonlight seen to the greatest perfection.

"That, my friends," said Rupert Thrustans, "is 'The Home,' the residence of her whose life and happiness I value far more than my own."

It was in tones of deep and heartfelt emotion that the young sailor spoke.

He led the way through the garden, and across a well trimmed lawn, with a slow footstep—at times an unsteady one. The highwaymen attributed it to the blood he had lost, and this, perhaps, was what made him feel so heavy-hearted, and so oppressed with the shadow of coming evil.

Not a single light beamed forth from any one window of the mansion. It seemed as though its inmates had one and all given themselves up to slumber.

Lieutenant Thrustans noticed the circumstance; as he did so, the reflection crossed his mind that it was a most unreasonable hour at which to pay a visit.

But Claude and Jack overruled his scruples, and urged upon him the importance of seeing the young girl as soon as possible.

A hint that she might even then be in danger, and in need of his succour, was enough to fix his determination.

He ascended the stone steps in front of the hall door, at which he knocked loudly.

No notice was taken of the summons.

He knocked again, but without result. All within the house was as still as though it was uninhabited.

A cold sensation was about the young sailor's heart. It was a presage that there was ill in store.

But he endeavoured to shake off the feeling.

"They sleep soundly," he said; "but never mind. Come with me to the servants' offices. I know where to find the steward."

Our friends, whatever may have been their thoughts, gave them no utterance, but silently followed the lieutenant round to the back of the premises.

The whole of the place was perfectly familiar to Rupert Thrustans, and he was able to go without hesitation to that portion of the building in which the steward's sleeping chamber was situate.

"That is his window," he said. "I shall be easily able to wake him by throwing some of the gravel against it."

So saying, he stooped and picked up a handful of the fine gravel of which the pathway was composed, and flung it against the window, not, however, with sufficient force to break the glass.

The means succeeded; for, after the lapse of a moment, the one-half of the latticed casement was thrown open, and a night-capped head appeared.

"Who's there? What do you want? Speak."

"Stevens," said Lieutenant Thrustans, stepping forward, so that the moon's rays fell full upon him. "Stevens, dress yourself and come down, I want to speak to you."

"The lord be good to us," said the voice which had before spoken, and which belonged to Stevens, the steward.

"It's Master Rupert come back at last. Wait a moment, I will soon slip my clothes on. I am glad you have come back. I have watched for you for many a weary month past, and now you have come, I have sad news to tell you—sad news."

"Good heavens!" cried Thrustans, in a voice of anguish. "A dull foreboding has sat heavy at my heart ever since I came in sight of the house. I felt sure something was amiss. Tell me, oh! tell me. Katharine!"

"Wait till I come down, Master Rupert, wait till I come down. I will tell you all then."

"Calm yourself," said Sixteen-String Jack. "believe me when things go wrong there is every necessity for it. Remember, you may have much to do. Your wound may, in consequence of undue excitement, turn to inflammation, and then you would be powerless. Be guided by me, sir, and be calm."

"I will, I will. That is, I will try to be; but when the

heart is racked with contending emotions, when one anticipates the worst, it is not possible to subdue the throbbings of the heart."

"But you can make the attempt to subdue them. Listen to what the old man has to say. Look, here he comes."

It was even so. In his anxiety, the steward had hurried on his clothing with greater celerity than he had thought of for many a year.

He was rather surprised when he saw our two friends, for, having stood in the shadow, he had not noticed them when he looked out of window.

"These are friends of mine, Stevens," said Thrustans, hastily. "They know all, so do not hesitate to speak before them. Do not either keep me in suspense."

"What a strange, ugly dog you have got with you, Master Rupert," said the old man, doubtfully.

"Do not be afraid, Stevens. He will not harm you."

"That is well, then. Ah! sir, while you have been gone, and since poor dear master died, there's been sad doings at 'The Home'—very sad indeed, sir. Miss Katharine—"

"What of her. Tell me—tell me. Is—is—She is not dead, surely?"

"No—no," replied the old man, hurriedly. "She's not dead, poor thing, though I don't know but what it would be better if she was. Alas! alas!"

"Explain yourself. Do not torture me any longer."

"I will not. But you must compose yourself, Master Rupert, and prepare to hear bad news. Alas! that ever I should have to tell it."

"Old man," said Thrustans, in a trembling voice, "do you not see that this suspense only increases my agitation? Speak—speak at once—tell me all."

"Yes," said Jack. "Tell him all that has befallen her."

The old man was quite overcome with grief. He had been all his life in the service of the Haywards, and he was attached to them with a rare devotion, so that he felt most keenly any sorrow that fell upon them.

Tears streamed down his cheeks.

His voice was choked and inarticulate with sobs.

"Miss Katharine," he said, "my dear young mistress, the richest heiress and the most beautiful girl in the whole county, is—is—"

"Oh! heavens! what?"

"Calm yourself, I pray. She is mad, and the inmate of an asylum!"

For some minutes after hearing this terrible announcement, Lieutenant Thrustans was completely prostrated. He was bereft both of speech and motion. He had conjectured many terrible things in connexion with his betrothed—had, as he thought, schooled himself to hear the worst, but the thought of madness had never once entered his brain—it was too, too horrible.

The sobbing of the old steward was the only sound that broke the silence.

At last the sailor found his voice.

"Mad!" he shrieked. "No, no! not mad! not mad! Tell me that she is anything but mad, and I will bless you. Speak, I say! Stevens—Stevens! Tell me that she—"

"God help us!" ejaculated the old steward, as Lieutenant Thrustans, having worked himself up to a pitch of frenzy, suddenly staggered and fell like one dead upon the earth, ere a hand could be outstretched to save him.

CHAPTER CXXI.

LIEUTENANT THRUSTANS SEES THE GLIMMER OF COMING HOPE.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK and Claude Duval were so utterly—to use a colloquial expression—taken aback by the startling intelligence respecting the betrothed of Lieutenant Thrustans, that they lost, for some few moments, their habitual self-command, or they would certainly have saved the gallant sailor from the heavy fall he had upon the gravelled path.

Koolah again uttered that horrible cry which had before "startled the dull ear of night," and Stevens, the steward, was so alarmed at it, that he drew back with the utmost precipitation.

Our friends, however, who knew nothing of it

animal to be aware that there was nothing to be dreaded from it in the shape of violence, stooped down, and raised him to his feet.

The cry of the faithful creature seemed to have had a revivifying power upon him, for his eyes opened, and a groan came from his lips.

"Kate—Kate!" he cried. "Speak to me, dear one. Tell me that this is all some horrible freak of my imagination. Kate, darling, where are you?"

"Rouse yourself, sir—rouse yourself," said Claude. "There is a necessity for immediate action. Kate is not here; but we, your friends, are."

Lieutenant Thrustans passed his hand over a bewildered manner across his eyes, as though he could, by that process, dispel the mists that hung about his brain, and then replied—

"Stevens!"

"Yes, Master Rupert, I am here," said the steward, venturing to approach.

"What were you telling me about a madhouse, Stevens?"

"Oh! my dear young sir, pray be calm—pray be calm."

"I am quite calm," he said, as he freed himself from the support of Claude's arm. "Quite calm. Quite collected. Repeat what you said."

The steward trembled. There was something more terrible about the assumption of unnatural calmness than there was in the fiercest expressions of despair.

"I said," he replied nervously, "that poor Miss Katharine had gone mad."

"Who said so?"

"Mr. Murray, who was the gentleman who was appointed to be her guardian, you know, sir."

"My friend," said Jack, "for such I hope you will permit me to call myself, endeavour, if you can, to regain something like a natural composure, and allow me to question the steward. Considering the difference there is in our state of mind, I do not think I should be going too far in saying that I could do so much better than yourself."

Again Rupert Thrustans passed his hand across his eyes.

"I believe I am going mad. I will try to be calm. Ask him. I will listen."

"You hear," said Jack, turning to Stevens. "Now tell me. You say her guardian reported her mad? Had you ever seen anything in your mistress's conduct to make you think her insane?"

"No, sir, I never did; but it was after she went to live in London that the fit came upon her. I did not see her, you understand, because I was here."

"Enough. Mr. Hayward had, then, a town residence?"

"He had, sir, in Woburn-square."

"And during her stay there she went mad?"

"Such, sir, was the report."

"And to what asylum was she conveyed?"

"I know not."

"Can you form no conjecture? Have you never heard anything to assist your doing so?"

"Never; and yet"—

"Yet what?"

"Now I remember, some eight months ago a man came here of a suspicious appearance, and demanded an interview with Mr. Murray. I refused to allow him to enter, upon which he took from his pocket-book a card, and told me to give it to my master, who would then see him."

"And did he?"

"Yes, and very much excited he seemed."

"But what was there in the fact of his coming that should make you recollect it?"

"For one thing, because he was the only stranger that ever came, and his manner, coupled with Mr. Murray's excitement, made an impression upon me."

Jack was silent for a moment.

He was baffled, and yet he seemed upon the verge of making the discovery.

Claude, who as usual had said nothing, but listened eagerly, now put a question.

"Did you look at the card you received?"

"Well, yes, I did, sir, for my curiosity was roused."

"And can you recollect what it said upon it?"

"Oh! yes, I never forgot; it seems as though I could see the card now."

"Good; that is important. Now tell us what were the words upon it?"

"Dr. Stoffel, Lowne House, Stamford-hill."

"Are you sure that was it?"

"Quite. The name of Stoffel, in the first place, is a peculiar one. Then the man himself looked a little like a doctor as he well could."

"Indeed. What sort of looking man was he?"

"A short, coarse, vulgar-looking man."

"We are on the right track, Jack," said Claude. "It is astonishing how one event seems to rise up out of another."

While this conversation was taking place the young officer gradually recovered the command of his faculties, and now quite calmly, but very differently to the way he had before spoken, he said—

"What do you make of this, my friends? You seem as though you comprehended it."

"I should not like to say that," said Claude, for Jack kept silent, "but I think I could, with every assurance, say that the young lady is not mad."

"Oh! sir, is that indeed your belief, or do you say it in the hope of affording me some consolation. If the latter, believe me it is a cruel mistake."

"It is not. I consider there is every reason to think she is as sane as either of us are at the present moment."

"Not mad!" repeated Stevens. "How can that be? She is in the asylum."

"She may be, and yet not be mad for all that. You have seen but little of the world, my friend. Do you believe all you hear?"

"Why, no, in a manner of speaking, I can't say I do?"

"Of course not, you have acquired that much experience of men and the world. Answer me another question. What cause was assigned for Miss Kate's madness, for there was one, surely?"

"Oh! yes. They said she had gone mad about a young man, a sailor, whom she loved, and who had been lost at sea."

"Ha!"

Lieutenant Thrustans pressed his hands to his temples.

"You see," said Claude, "the villainy is becoming more apparent now."

"I am horrified."

"And well you may be."

"What course should you advise?"

"A bold one."

"What would it be? I have the most implicit faith in your judgment."

"I should propose, then, subject to your approval, that we make all the speed we can to Stamford-hill, the residence of this Doctor Stoffel, and, no doubt, keeper of a private lunatic asylum, and carry off the young girl by main force. Does the plan meet with your approval, Jack?"

"It does, unquestionably. There cannot be a doubt, I think, about the correctness of all our premises, and if she is to be saved from what must be a thousand times worse than death itself, it must be done by force and stratagem, and not by any appeal to the legal powers."

Claude was pleased that Jack so fell in with his views; and as for the lieutenant, not only had he made up his mind to submit to their guidance, but the plan proposed was quite in accordance with the sailor-like notions he had imbibed.

The steward scarcely knew what to make of the proceedings of the night, and he looked first at one and then at another with an air of such perfect bewilderment that it was quite ludicrous to see him.

"And now," continued Jack, who naturally assumed the leadership of the affair, "I know the place where this doctor lives. It is a long way from here, but the night is young yet. Let us start at once. Stevens, have you a horse in the stable?"

"Yes, sir."

"Saddle, it then, and bring it out for Mr. Thrustans. We are going away now; when we return we shall bring your young mistress with us."

The old man hurried off to the stables.

Claude followed him. He knew he was much more competent to saddle the horse than the steward was.

In a few minutes he appeared with what Stevens assured him was the best horse in the stable.

By the way in which the lieutenant sprang into the

saddle and handled the reins, Claude saw he was an accomplished horseman.

Jack and Duval both vaulted into their own saddles, and all three were quite ready for a start.

Stevens only half understood what was taking place, and a rather anxious consultation took place as to whether he should be told of the fate that had overtaken Mr. Murray, but it was decided in the end that it would be best not to do so.

"No," said Claude Duval, "let us go at once. We have no time to lose. We must be there before the news of Mr. Murray's death can reach the ears of the rascal who keeps that most iniquitous of all places—a private mad-house."

CHAPTER CXXII.

RUPERT THRUSTANS AND OUR FRIENDS STILL CLING TO THE IDEA THAT IT IS AT LOWNE HOUSE THEY WILL FIND KATHARINE HAYWARD.

To trace step by step the progress of our friends from "The Home" to Stamford-hill would only have the effect of wearying the reader. Let it suffice to say that the distance as far as the then thinly-inhabited village of Stoke Newington was passed over without the occurrence of any incident worthy of special record.

The reader will not fail to have noticed that all three jumped, in a manner of speaking, to the conclusion that Lowne House, the residence of Dr. Stoffel, was the private lunatic asylum in which Katharine was confined, without having anything like positive evidence that such was the case.

But somehow or other the idea took a firm hold of their imagination, as things sometimes will, and they felt a degree of certainty upon the point amounting almost to conviction.

Whether they were right we shall quickly see. At present we think it quite possible that they have permitted their feelings to mislead them.

However, as we have said, they reached the little village of Stoke Newington.

Lieutenant Thrustans being amply provided with funds, they found no difficulty in getting fresh horses, so that the distance, although great, was passed over in what would be deemed an unprecedentedly short space of time.

But being now in the immediate neighbourhood of the place they sought, they resolved to proceed at a slower rate and talk over the plan of action to be pursued.

Jack was speaking in reply to a question put to him by the young officer, who had now recovered his ordinary state of mind, which showed that the wound he had received was quite a superficial one.

"We both know this part of the country uncommonly well," Jack was saying, "but still, for all that, our knowledge is not sufficiently extensive to enable us to say precisely where Lowne House is. I think I told you we had been some time absent from England."

"You did, sir."

"Notwithstanding that, I still think I can find the place, and that with little trouble; but before we reach it, we must settle something like a definite course of action. To wait and do this on our arrival at our destination will only be to lose time, so I propose that we go the rest of the way quietly, and that will not only give ourselves and our horses a rest, but afford us plenty of time for deliberation."

"Whatever you may think is for the best I'm quite ready to agree to," replied Thrustans.

"I am afraid you place too much confidence in us. I would much rather explain things as we go on."

"Such a course cannot but be satisfactory."

"In the first place, then," said Claude, "we must assume we are so far correct in our suppositions as this. Mr. Murray having been left guardian, has been tempted to try to get the whole of the estates and property into his own hands. During the persecution which Katharine must have endured at his hands, after his resolving to carry this project into execution, she probably told him of her betrothment to you. What other means he may have tried to effect his purpose does not matter. It is enough that one of them was to shut her up in a lunatic asylum, and propagate the report that she was mad. The story of her attachment to a sailor, and her grief at hearing of his

loss, would form a plausible reason for so sad an occurrence."

The lieutenant was filled with admiration at the very skilful manner in which Claude had reduced the many and complicated events to a substance that carried on the face of it a strong impression of its actuality.

"Then," said Jack, "such being the state of affairs, his motive for acting as he did towards you, sir, follows as a matter of course. Your letter, which you forwarded to 'The Home,' addressed to Miss Katharine, would fall into his hands. He would read it and become aware of the appointment, but not of the peculiar terms under which it was to take place. In you he would see an enemy from whose untiring energy he would have everything to fear. To a man who had already perpetrated so much villainy, the assassination of a man—a stranger, too—upon a deserted, never-visited spot, would appear but an ordinary affair, and one, too, that was absolutely necessary to his retention of the property. He failed in his object, and the retribution which overtook him is as just as it is terrible."

It was now the officer's turn to look at Jack with surprise, after hearing from him this lucid account of the motives which led to the commitment of the frightful deed.

"I see," he said, "your minds are far more acute and logical than mine. More skilful, too, in untangling cause from effect, and drawing deductions from them."

"You flatter us."

"No. I merely compliment you upon the possession of an admirable power."

"Let us waive it, then. Does what we have together said bear to you the appearance of reality?"

"It does. Alas! that it should be so, it seems to carry conviction with it. Oh! my friends, what may the poor girl not have suffered?"

Our friends were silent.

Perhaps they were even better able to form an idea upon the subject than he was.

"It is terrible to think of," continued the lieutenant. "Let us hasten to set her free, for it would amount to positive cruelty upon my part were I to allow her sufferings to continue now I have been made cognizant of them."

"That brings me," resumed Claude, "to the point I wished to reach. We have advised a forcible removal from the asylum, when we have law on our side. But it is a very ticklish thing to have anything to do with; and, even if you are successful, some time must necessarily elapse before she can be released. But you ought to know that a person cannot be confined in a madhouse without the signatures of two diplomated physicians. There are men who will for a consideration sign a certificate that a person is mad whether or not such is really the case."

"Good heavens!" said the lieutenant. "I knew nothing of this before. Why, no one is actually safe."

"No one, when he has an unscrupulous enemy to deal with. And now, you will say, why not find out these physicians who have signed the certificate for Katharine's imprisonment—for that she is mad I do not for a moment believe—and punish them? But, believe me, such an attempt would be quite futile. Feeling how much was at stake, and as the keeper of the asylum would be as much implicated in the affair as themselves, they would manage, by the administration of drugs, or other means, to render her mad, at least at the time the examination takes place, and then she would be lost to you for ever."

"Oh! let us fly—fly at once," said the officer, who was horror-stricken at the recital of so much villainy. "Your plan is indeed the best."

"I am glad you think so. It is true Mr. Murray is dead, and that they would have no interest in keeping her—I mean so far as money goes; yet, you see, having committed themselves, they dare not release her."

"Come on—come on."

Lieutenant Thrustans would then and there have set off at a gallop, but Claude stayed him.

"Gently," he said; "we must act with all caution. Craft can only properly be met by craft. We are now at Stamford-hill. Our first act must be to ascertain the whereabouts of Lowne House."

"And then," added Jack, "we had better enter it, and

by threatening his life, compel the asylum-keeper to give Katharine into our hands."

"Agreed."

The commodious residences which now cluster so thickly about this neighbourhood have all been built long subsequent to the times of which we write. Then it was broad, open country, but thinly dotted with habitations.

As the lieutenant uttered the word agreed, there came to the ears of all three a faint rumbling sound, accompanied by the tinkling of a bell, and, looking in the direction from which it proceeded, they saw in the distance a covered waggon, creeping slowly along the road.

"Capital," cried Jack. "I daresay from him we shall be able to gather the information we require, but, as he will be a long time reaching this spot at the rate he is progressing, I will, with your permission, gallop up to him and make the inquiry. It will be hardly worth while for all to go, and besides, seeing us in such force, might have the effect of alarming him."

"Yes," said Claude, "it will be best for you to go alone. We will wait here for you."

Of course, the lieutenant made no objection.

Claude, however, had divined Jack's motive for wishing to go alone, and what that motive was, will very quickly be apparent.

The waggon was somewhere about half-a-mile down the road, and was going in the direction of London.

It took Jack only a few minutes to overtake it.

From their position on the hill, Claude and Thrustans were able to watch his progress down the road, and see the cumbersome vehicle brought to a standstill.

Then something followed, which they could not very well make out, for the distance was too great for them to see Jack's figure very distinctly, but that something of a very unusual character was going on they were quite certain.

What it was Claude more than half suspected, though the seaman did not. However, we will just follow Jack down the road, and make the reader acquainted with exactly what was going on.

CHAPTER CXIII.

AN AGENT IN THE NEFARIOUS SCHEME AGAINST KATHARINE FALLS RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY INTO THE HANDS OF JACK RAN.

"HALT!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, as he whirled his horse round suddenly to face the driver. "Halt. I wish to speak to you."

More upon the impulse of the moment than of reflection, the waggoner, hearing a voice call to him to stop, lightened the reins, and the horses with the utmost willing assent came to a standstill.

"Anan, sir?" asked the driver, who was only partially awake, driving with their eyes shut being a feat such individuals are very fond of practising. "Anan, sir?"

"I want to go to Lowne House, Stamford-hill. Do you know it?"

The waggoner shook his head to give increased emphasis to his negative, and said—

"Noa, sir. I doant."

"Not know it? Why, it is where Doctor Stoffel lives!"

"Anan?"

"Curse you anan! I's where Doctor Stoffel lives."

"Doan't know him, sir. The only doctor as I knows of about these parts is Doctor Green, and it bain't him; leastways he's in the wiggin."

"Villain!" roared a voice, which proceeded from beneath the canvas covering of the waggon. "Villain! how dare you say I was here?"

"Lauk, sir, I didn't think it wor so farn, sir."

"Drive on at once, and leave this man, who may be a highwayman for ought I know, to make his inquiries somewhere else. Drive on, I say."

"Oh!" thought Jack. Then he said, rapidly, in a loud, fierce tone, "If you venture to go on before I give you leave to do so, I will blow your brains out!"

"Mercy! mercy! It's a highwayman, as I'm a sinner. Spare my life! spare my life!"

"Sit still, then, and you are safe; but so sure as you attempt to drive on, you are a dead man!"

The waggoner dropped the reins, and huddled himself up on his seat.

Jack now rapidly made his way to the back of the waggon, and drew aside the canvas which covered it.

When he did so the moon shone full into the vehicle, and he was able to see the interior with tolerable distinctness.

To his surprise he found it contained several people.

He knew well enough that it was no unusual thing for people to ride in the cross-country waggons when coming to London, but such journeys were usually made by day, and not by night.

It was not those who could not afford to hire a better conveyance who were the sole travellers in so cumbersome an affair. Many did it for the purpose of eluding observation, for all the roads about London were then particularly dangerous to those who had anything to lose.

Added to this there did not exist that facility of communication between places which now exists, and to which we have become so familiar. There were many out-of-the-way places near which the stage-coaches never came, and from which the only way of reaching the metropolis was by means of some such vehicle as this was.

Several women were in the waggon, and upon seeing Jack they all set up a succession of screams, which made it quite out of the question for anything else to be heard above the din.

There was no resource but to wait until it subsided, and this soon happened, for they could not help seeing there was something aggressive in Jack's manner.

"Doctor Green," cried Jack, "I am sorry to trouble you, but I have very important business with Dr. Stoffel, whose address I am told is Lowne House, Stamford-hill. Can you direct me to it?"

"What do you want?"

"That, sir, lies between us alone. Can you tell me whereabouts it is?"

"Ye—no—no, I can't."

"Why you began to say yes. What do you mean? Now I have asked you quietly enough, but I don't put up with nonsense from anybody, so mind what you are at."

"Oh! you need not think to bully me sir!" said Doctor Green, screwing himself as far into the corner as he could; "I'm not to be bullied."

"Did you address those remarks to me?"

"Yes; and I repeat, sir, I won't be bullied!"

"Come out," said Jack, "come out like a man, and don't hide behind the ladies. Come out, I say."

"Don't you wish you may get it? Drive on, I say, drive on."

The driver knows better; and if you don't choose to come out I'll pull you out."

"Me, sir. I'd advise you to try it on."

There was something very offensive to Jack in the manner of this Doctor Green, and he could not help somehow connecting him in his mind with the keeper of the private asylum.

Now the doctor spoke as he did, because he thought he was tolerably safe, for he occupied the top part of the waggon—that is to say, the part furthest from the end—so that all the other passengers were between him and Jack.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said our friend, "I am really sorry to trouble and delay you, but I cannot help myself. I want to know the position of a certain house, and, from his manner, it appears Mr. Green knows where that house is, but will not tell me. Can any of you give me the information?"

"No," replied a chorus of voices. "We are strangers, and were never in this part before."

"That is enough. I must trouble you to alight, and then when I drag the doctor out, I shan't hurt anybody."

Upon hearing these words there was a general movement on the part of the occupants of the waggon.

"No—no. Don't get out," cried the doctor, "he only wants to rob you, or murder you, perhaps."

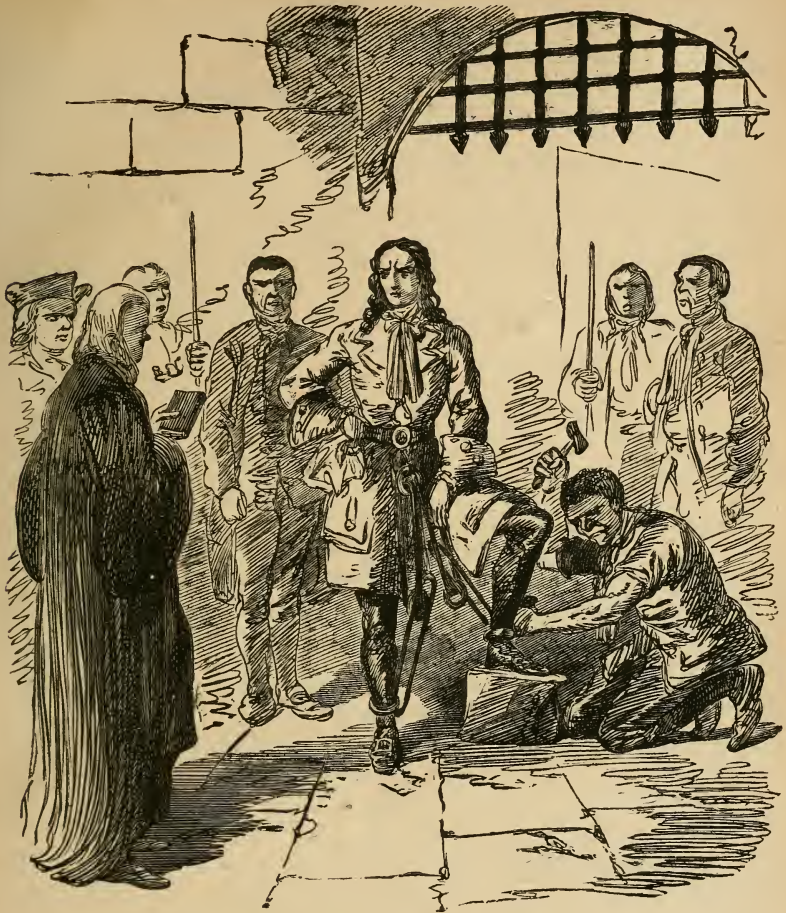
But they were deaf to his cries, and they got out as quickly as they could.

"I'll tell you. I'll tell you. Stop! stop! It won't matter, though, for he don't live there now."

"That won't do for me. I must have you out. You and I won't part company just yet."

While he spoke Jack assisted the last person to leave the waggon.

There was now no one in it but the doctor.



[THE SMITH KNOCKS OFF TOM KING'S FETTERS.]

He screwed himself up into a yet smaller compass. Jack drew forth a pistol.

"Now," he said, "I can see you from here quite plainly. I will count three, and if you are not out by that time, I fire. It will be an impossibility for me to miss you. One—two—"

Doctor Green rolled out with the greatest celerity.

But just as he was about to disappear over the tail-board, Jack clutched him firmly by the collar.

"Oh! no!" he said, "you won't get away from me very easily, you'll find. Oh! no!"

He touched his horse as he spoke, and dragged the doctor fairly out of the cart, but he still retained his hold.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Jack, "I hope you will accept my apologies, but what else could I do? The bird that can sing, and won't sing, must be made to sing. Good night. I hope you won't be interrupted during the rest of your journey."

As he spoke these words, without waiting to see what No. 24.—BLACK BESS.

No. 24.

the people said or did, he turned his horse's head towards the spot where he had left his companions, and set off at a gallop.

If he had turned his head, which he did not, he would have seen that the people saw with no small consternation the very unceremonious manner in which the doctor was abducted.

Before he started, Jack had assured himself that his hold was a good one, and, relying upon his strength, he fairly dragged Mr. Green along.

To be sure it was not very comfortable for that gentleman himself, but that was a thing that troubled Jack slightly, for he considered he had no one to blame but himself.

Claude and the lieutenant heard him coming, and rode forward to meet him.

They were astonished to see a man clinging, as they thought, to his saddle.

"It's all right," cried Jack; "lay hold of him, Claude, for my arm is tired. Don't loose him. I think we shall

find he knows a great deal that we are so anxious to know."

Claude laid hold of the doctor in a moment, but he dismounted first.

Then Jack had a good look at his captive.

He was a miserable little decrepit old man, and this accounted for the ease with which Jack had been able to hold him with one hand.

His demeanour was now abject in the extreme.

He was thoroughly terrified, and fully believed that his last hour had come.

"Mercy!" he shrieked. "Help! help! Murder!"

"Silence," said Jack, "or murder it will be. Silence him, Claude."

Claude Duval rather roughly put his hand over the old man's mouth.

"We must settle this," said Jack, as he dismounted. "I will soon make him secure."

He took off the curb-rein as he spoke, and tightly pinioned the old man with it.

Then going to Claude's horse, he possessed himself of his curb-rein also, and forming one end of it into a noose, he slipped it over his head, and drew it rather tightly round his neck, but not so as to impede his breathing.

"You can let him go now," he said. "I think he is pretty safe."

CHAPTER CXXIV.

OUR FRIENDS ARE SUCCESSFUL IN FINDING LOWNE HOUSE, AND MAKE A TOOL OF DOCTOR GREEN.

"SPARE ME! spare me! Spare my miserable life!" said Doctor Green, and he sank upon his knees in the road as he spoke. "Spare my wretched life, and I will tell you all!"

It was clear he did not at all relish the noose that fitted him so closely, and his fear that this proceeding was but a preliminary towards hanging him was only natural.

"Upon those sole conditions," said Jack, "may you presume to call your life your own?"

"I will tell you all, good sir. All—all."

"Silence! and do not venture to speak unless leave is given to you to do so."

"I—I am silent."

The doctor was in a perfect agony of fright.

Claude looked at Jack for some kind of explanation.

As for the lieutenant, no words could possibly express the look of intense astonishment which was depicted upon his face.

He was like one in a dream.

And, in fact, when we come to consider upon the extraordinary nature of the events which had occurred during the last few hours, we shall scarcely feel surprised at the confusion of his intellects.

"I found this man in the waggon going apparently towards London, but whether he really was, or what was his motive for being there at all, is more than I can say. Certain it is, when I asked after Doctor Stoffel, his manner was so suspicious that I felt he must be in some way connected with that individual."

"No—n—!" began Doctor Green, but he was silenced by Jack.

"I can't make anything out of it," replied Duval.

"But all I can say is this, that if all our suppositions prove to be correct, and this man is mixed up in the affair, I should say there was something out of the common way in such a coincidence of events."

"I hope you will get hold of no superstitious notions about it. However, now for the doctor."

Jack, as he spoke, turned to the trembling captive, and said—

"Show us the way to Lowne House, and that by the most direct route. Do you hear?"

"Yes—yes. Up the hill, good sir. Spare my life, up the hill, and then the first turning to the left."

"Your life is spared," replied Jack, "but if you attempt to deceive us, we be to you."

Claude and Jack remounted.

They had now only the snaffle reins with which to guide their horses, but as they were tired there was little trouble in maintaining command of them.

It was Jack who kept firm hold of the one end of the rein, of which the other formed the noose about the doctor's head.

This left that gentleman two modes of action.

One was to stand still and be strangled!

The other was to follow submissively.

The latter, as may be supposed, was the alternative chosen.

He was not, however, put to any very great inconvenience, for the three friends, as they might fairly be called, proceeded at a walk up the hill.

They were now silent, for it was by no means part of their plan to let the doctor know much about them—at any rate more than was unavoidable.

In a little more than ten minutes they reached the top of the hill, and then Jack said—

"How far on is the lane you spoke of?"

"Only a few yards now. Do you see that group of trees?"

"Yes—yes!"

"They are at the entrance of it."

"Oh! indeed. Come on."

Their pace was now accelerated a little, which was a most inconvenient circumstance for Mr. Green, for he was old and rather shaky about the legs.

Nothing but the most settled conviction that he was in some way mixed up with the iniquities of Lowne House would have induced Jack to behave as he did to him.

For our own part we think he might just as well have waited until he was assured of that fact.

But the strange life he had led enabled him to arrive very quickly at conclusions, and very rarely indeed was it that he proved wrong.

The lane which they were informed led to Dr. Stoffel's was a very dark one. On both sides of it grew some unusually large horse-chestnut trees, and so closely did the branches interlace one another that it was only here and there the moon could find her way through them.

Upon entering this place, the two highwaymen looked with additional keenness after their prisoner, for they thought it not unlikely he would take advantage of the darkness and endeavour to escape.

Like most other country lanes, this one was narrow and winding. In fact, in no part of it had they been able to see twenty yards before them.

Nor could they find the least evidences to show that there were human habitations at all contiguous to it.

Jack grew impatient.

"I say, Dr. Green," he cried, "how much farther along the lane is it?"

"Only a little way now. Oh, dear!"

"I should advise you to take care, if you value that miserable life of yours."

"You will find it right, good sir."

"Confound it! the house is Lowne, and no mistake," continued Jack, "the trees get thicker every moment."

It may not be amiss to explain what Jack meant.

"Lowne" was a word much more in use then than it is at the present day, though in many of the provinces it is constantly employed.

Its meaning, as many of our readers doubtless are aware, is "sheltered and screened from the wind," and the term is generally restricted to that kind of shelter or shade which is afforded by trees.

Hence, Lowne House signified "a house sheltered from the wind by trees."

Now, it was the name which at first struck Jack. It was just such a one as would be applied to a place of the description that they supposed Doctor Stoffel to keep.

"There!" cried Doctor Green. "Look! you see I am quite right. That brick wall surrounds the house."

All three upon hearing these words looked, and there they saw, on the right-hand side of the lane, the corner of an unusually high wall.

"Surround the house," said Claude. "Did I understand you this wall surrounded the house?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Then what is his motive for having such a high wall all round his house? Why, it must quite shut out all the view!"

"He! he! he!"

"Did you laugh?"

"No, good sir. No—no! I didn't laugh! Indeed, I didn't! Only the thought of shutting out the view."

"Ha! you have betrayed yourself! Now, answer me truly. Is, or is not, Lowne House a private lunatic asylum?"

"Oh! dear; I suppose you must know. Yes, it is."

By the time this little conversation was terminated, they had passed along that portion of the brick wall which abutted upon the lane, until they came to some large entrance-gates.

They were of wood, painted some dark colour.

Here they paused.

"And this is the entrance to Lowne House?"

"It is, gentlemen, it is."

"Enough; say no more than you are obliged. You are, of course, well acquainted with the premises."

"Really I—a really!"

"Any hesitation will be your death."

"I am."

It was wonderful what a love the doctor had got for his life, but then it is a commodity that we all prize rather highly.

"Then," said Jack, in tones that left behind no doubt of his earnestness, "we are going to force our way in."

"Stop!" said Claude, "I have a thought."

He whispered something rapidly in Jack's ear, who thereupon said—

"To be sure, to be sure—much the best. Now, Doctor Green, listen to me."

Jack dismounted as he spoke, and his example was immediately followed by his companions.

Then a fresh consideration presented itself to their notice—what were they to do with their horses?

They could not enter with them very well, and yet it was important that they should be somewhere close at hand when wanted.

There was only one way to manage this, and that was to tie the horses to some of the lower branches of the trees.

This done, Doctor Green, much to his gratification and surprise, found himself freed from the thongs which had held him in bondage.

But Jack took care to keep a tight hold of him, and then Claude walked close behind him, and said—

"Do you feel that, doctor?"

"Yes, yes. Murder! You're running it into me. Murder."

"Be quiet. It is my sword. All you have got to do is to obey. The moment you don't I shall run you through. It will be the easiest thing in the world."

"Murder!"

"Of course it will be murder if you force me to it, but I hope you will have too much good sense."

"Oh! dear."

"Now," said Jack, "you will answer questions just as I tell you; but, in the first place, how do you let the doctor know when he has any visitors?"

Poor Doctor Green thought the best thing he could do was to make a virtue of necessity, and he said, with an appearance of great candour—

"You will find the handle of a bell hanging against the wall. Pull it, and they will come."

It was the lieutenant who now spoke.

He began to see what was going on.

"All right," he said. "Here's the bell-handle. Shall I pull it?"

"By all means."

A tremendous clanging followed, which attested not only to the size of the bell itself, but the vigour with which the wire had been pulled.

"And harkye, Doctor Brown," said Jack, "we have made up our minds to get in here, but not by force as we first intended. You shall take us in and say we are friends of yours."

"I can't—I can't! Indeed I can't."

"Oh! very well then, you may as well die at once. We are bound to get in, but the best way will be for you to comply with our wishes."

The doctor groaned, but consideration for his own life triumphed over every other feeling.

"Hullo!" said Lieutenant Thrustans. "Here's somebody coming." "Down, Koolah, down!"

The tiger-wolf crouched submissively at his feet.

CHAPTER CXXV.

KOOLAH INDUCES DOCTOR STOFFEL TO COMPLY WITH HIS VISITOR'S WISHES.

THE sound produced by some one walking with a heavy tread upon a soft gravelled path could now be heard.

"Who's there?" asked a voice, gruffly, and a faint flash of light came through the interstices of the wood-work of which the gates were composed. "Who's there?"

"Say Doctor Green, who wants to see Doctor Stoffel immediately, upon important business," whispered Jack to his captive.

Claude seconded this command by a prick with his sword, and so he said, with a faint groan—

"Doctor Green. It's Doctor Green. I want to see Doctor Stoffel immediately upon important business."

"All right, sir," said the voice. "I'll open the gate in a moment."

The withdrawal of heavy bolts, and the clangour of a falling chain followed, and then a small door, constructed in the large gates themselves, was flung open.

A very rough-looking man stood upon the threshold.

"Come in, Mr. Green, it's all right. Come in."

Jack had got the doctor's arm very tight beneath his own, and they entered together, Claude and Lieutenant Thrustans following closely in the rear.

The man who had opened the gate was quite surprised to see four persons enter, when he thought the doctor only was outside.

He, however, did not make any remark, but after very carefully refastening the door, preceded them up a kind of carriage drive.

In a few minutes they came in sight of a large, dark, square building, from two windows in which issued a faint light.

The remainder was in complete darkness.

Claude and Jack concentrated the whole of their attention upon the unfortunate doctor, in order to see that he did not attempt to carry out any treachery against them.

Their fears, however, were quite groundless. He was completely terrified into submission, and henceforth he was but a puppet in their hands.

Two steps led up to the front door of Lowne House.

These were ascended.

The door itself was ajar, from which it might be inferred that the man who had let them in had emerged from it, and so left it.

He carried in his hand a rude stable-lantern, the sides of which were formed of horn, of so opaque a quality, that the rays of the candle within had the utmost difficulty in struggling through it.

The man pushed open the door, and then turning round upon the threshold, held it open to allow the visitors to enter.

He then very carefully shut and fastened it.

Our intruders stood close to each other in the passage, waiting for the keeper—for such they took him to be—to guide them.

"Go on, doctor," he said; "go on into the little parlour. Mr. Stoffel will be with you directly."

"Remember," whispered Jack in his companion's ear, "remember, your life is in your own hands."

Doctor Green evidently understood what was meant, for he walked across the hall towards a massive-looking old-fashioned door.

Jack opened it, and all entered with the exception of the keeper, who, of course, went to inform his employer of the late arrival.

A lamp on the table was burning brightly, and diffused a cheerful light through the apartment. Just, in fact, sufficient to disperse the darkness in the more distant corners of it.

Claude was compelled to sheathe his sword. It would have looked strange to have continued to hold it drawn in his grasp. A premature alarm would have spoilt everything.

Jack, though, still held his pistol, and took the opportunity of impressing again upon Green the policy of obeying them in everything.

"The least attempt at treachery, and you die! It will be impossible to elude my aim. Agree to everything we say; that is the only means by which you may hope to escape a violent death."

With many protestations, Dr. Green promised to do as he was bid.

The three friends then held a hurried whispered conference, in which they finally agreed upon the parts they were each to play.

To release this, however, is needless. What their

agreed to do will be best seen by the manner in which they acted.

Doctor Green was forced to seat himself in a chair opposite to the door.

Jack sat next to him with the pistol in his left hand in such a position that the doctor's body was quite covered by it.

Claude sat down near the door.

Lieutenant Thrustans, who, despite all the efforts which he made to control himself, could scarcely control his agitation.

Koolah was near his feet.

With a rare sagacity, such as is displayed by no animal but the dog, it had followed him submissively and unobtrusively into the parlour, so that the keeper beyond, noticing that something in the shape of a dog accompanied the party, thought nothing of it.

These dispositions having been made, they waited impatiently the arrival of the private madhouse keeper.

In reality, these arrangements were made very briefly indeed, and there was scarcely time for Doctor Stoffel to arrive.

About two minutes afterwards a shuffling footstep in the hall reached the attentive ears of our friends.

"Beware, Doctor Green," said Jack, in an impressive whisper.

A half-articulate groan was the reply.

Then the parlour-door opened.

A man, whose appearance tallied exactly with the description Stevens the steward gave of it, entered.

He rubbed his hands together, and made a general kind of bow to his visitors.

He said nothing, however, but waited for them to explain their presence.

Of this Jack immediately availed himself.

"Doctor Stoffel, I presume?" he said.

"Yes," was the reply, accompanied with a bow.

"I have called—or perhaps I ought more properly to say we have called, and in the 'we' I include our mutual friend here, Doctor Green."

Upon thus hearing his name mentioned the unfortunate wretch could not forbear a groan.

"Dear me, Green," said Jack, "what's the matter?"

"Oh! noth—nothing—nothing."

"But you groaned."

"A slight pain."

"Oh! I see; boot pinched you, perhaps?"

"Ye-es."

"Then, if that is all, my mind is at rest. I feared it might be something serious. Pardon me, Doctor Stoffel, but, being a particular friend of your colleague's here, I feel a little anxious about him."

Doctor Stoffel was all abroad, as the saying is. A vague suspicion that all this meant something unpleasant crossed his mind.

Jack, however, went on rapidly.

"I was about to say we have been commissioned by Mr. Stephen Murray to see and have an interview with his ward. That is correct, Green, is it not?"

"Quite correct," said Green.

"But—but—"

"Believe me, my dear sir, time is of the greatest possible importance to us, so I hope you will attend to our wishes at once."

"Who are you?"

"A particular friend of Mr. Murray's, or he would not have entrusted me with this affair. To convince you, however, that all is quite right, we have brought your friend Doctor Green with us."

"Ahem!"

"Sir?"

"You will excuse me, I am sure, but my astonishment at what you have just said is so great that I was unable to say at once that I am quite at a loss to comprehend this affair. I can assure you I know nothing of what you have just spoken about."

A look of great pleasure immediately appeared upon the face of Doctor Green.

"On! indeed," said Jack; "well, this is just what we expected, only we thought we would try fair means first. Claude! guard the door!"

Upon hearing these words, Mr. Stoffel turned round on his heels with great suddenness, and made a rush to get out of the room, but he only ran into Claude's arms.

"Help! murder!" he cried. "Jarvis! Jarvis! I say." Claude Duval caught him by the throat.

The amount of compression which he used was quite sufficient to put a stop to further outcries.

Lieutenant Thrustans then, as agreed upon, in case events should take the turn they had, caught Doctor Stoffel from behind, and pulled him over on to the floor on his back.

Then, upon a word from him, Koolah sprang upon the prostrate form.

But he did him no injury.

That is to say, no bodily injury.

The fearful aspect of this creature filled the rascally madhouse-keeper's soul with such a terror as he had never hitherto known.

"Speak above a whisper, or seek to make the least alarm," said Claude, "and you are left to the mercies of the tiger-wolf, above you."

Doctor Stoffel lay perfectly still.

The frightful aspect of the animal, whose jaws were but a few inches from his throat, subdued him.

"I will do all you wish," he said, "so that you save me from this terrible creature. What are your demands?"

"You are getting reasonable now," said Jack; "but do not think to deceive us. We want Katharine Hayward. We know she is here. To deny it would be useless."

"Take away this monster, and I will obey you in all things, I swear."

"I would not take your oath. You shall, however, be released; but the creature looks upon you as its lawful prey, and it only needs a word or a sign from its master, and it would tear you to pieces."

CHAPTER CXXVI.

KATHARINE HAYWARD IS SAVED FROM LIVING DEATH.

DOCTOR STOFFEL SHUDDERED VIBLY.

The young lieutenant spoke to the tiger-wolf.

In obedience to his words, the terrible looking animal removed its feet from the doctor's breast, but most reluctantly.

"You can rise," said Jack; "but remember, this creature has its eye upon you. If he sees you move towards the door, that movement will be the signal for him to spring upon you. Think twice, therefore, before you attempt any treachery."

"What do you want, gentlemen? What do you want? Tell me, and I will do it?"

"We require Miss Katherine Hayward, whom you hold here unlawfully under the pretext of being mad."

"I will go and bring her to you."

"I would advise you not to do so. No, Mr. Stoffel, we don't like you well enough, and we don't know you well enough to trust you so far. Call in one of your men, and in our presence tell him to bring the young lady to this apartment. Do you hesitate?"

"No—no. Oh! I am ruined—ruined!"

"Call your man."

"I will. If you ring that bell he will come to see what is wanted."

"Very good," said Jack, as he rung it. "Mind what you tell him, or you will find the flesh torn from your body!"

The door was opened in another moment.

Doctor Stoffel again hesitated, and then he managed to stammer out his orders to the man, who was the same who had permitted our friends ingress.

"Jarvis," said Doctor Stoffel, "go to No. 14, and bring her here."

Jarvis looked rather surprised at this command, but saying nothing he withdrew.

The pause that now took place was full of interest and excitement.

Rupert Thrustans drew his breath with difficulty. His whole body trembled. His heart palpitated.

He was upon the verge now of seeing her he loved with so much constancy and devotion.

Doctor Green leaned back in the chair in which he had been seated. He resigned himself to the current of events.

A quarter of an hour, which seemed to our three friends like a quarter of a day, elapsed before they heard any sound indicative of the return of the man Jarvis.

At length his heavy tread was heard: the door was

opened, and he re-entered, accompanied by what the lieutenant's heart told him was his betrothed.

We say his heart, for most surely by his eyes alone never would he have recognised her.

Claude, so soon as they were fairly in the room, saw the door again, and stood with his back against it, thus preventing the possibility of escape.

The situation of the different characters in the room deserves a few minutes description.

First, then, there was Claude against the door with his drawn sword in his hand.

Then there was Jack, armed with a pistol, standing near the chair in which the doctor sat, a huddled-up mass.

The keeper of the asylum clutching nervously at the edge of the table, unable to remove his gaze from the bright eyes of the tiger-wolf, who suffered not the slightest movement to escape him.

Jarvis, too, stood just within the room, looking from one to the other in bewilderment and alarm.

Shrinking behind him—her hair in disorder—her attire scanty and torn—her face pinched—her cheeks hollow—her arms wasted—that baleful-looking light in her beautiful, but now unnaturally bright eyes, which is ever the accompaniment of insanity, stood the heiress, the victim of the villainy of the treacherous guardian and false friend, Stephen Murray.

A cry, in which was concentrated a whole world of agony, came from the lips of the young lieutenant, as his eyes rested upon the fearful spectacle.

He sprang forward though as he uttered it, and clasped the poor maniac in his arms.

"Kate! Kate!" he cried. "Can this indeed be you? Speak to me, dear one! speak! Your voice cannot have changed! Let me hear it! Speak, speak, Kate! It is Rupert who speaks to you! Your own true love, Rupert! Kate—Kate!"

It was not the words themselves, but the impassioned tone in which they were uttered, that awakened the slumbering intellect of the poor girl.

A gush of tears came to her eyes, and her head sank upon his breast.

"Saved—saved!" she said. "I am saved! Oh! Rupert, they tell me I am mad, but I am not, indeed I am not."

Doctor Stoffel clutched the table edge with a yet tighter grasp. Had he not done so, his trembling limbs would have allowed his body to reach the floor, and he had everything to dread from such a movement.

Of a truth was he suffering some portion of the torment he deserved.

The lieutenant's heart was too full to allow him to speak. He could only kiss the tears from the face of her he loved.

It was some moments before either of the spectators of the affecting interview ventured to speak, and then it was Jack, who said—

"Pardon me, lieutenant; but, if you will take my advice, you will leave this place with as little delay as possible. You see the effect which residence here has already had upon her, besides which, we may be incurring danger."

What her madness might have found a resting-place in Katharine's brain, seemed to have flown away with her tears, for now in quite a calm voice she spoke—

"Yes—yes, Rupert! Take me away—take me away! Oh! I have dreamed of this—looked forward to it! I knew you would save me from the horrors of this place."

"And I will, Kate! I will!"

"I am glad," said Jack, to the young seaman, "that matters are no worse."

"Mercy—mercy!" cried Doctor Stoffel, as, finding it impossible to hold up any longer, he sank down upon the floor.

Koolah sprang upon him with an angry growl.

Fairly, indeed, might the lieutenant have been excused if he had suffered the tiger-wolf to destroy him, but that was a thing he could not think of for a moment, and so he stayed him.

Jarvis was a strong, determined-looking man, but the odds were too much against him for resistance to be thought of, so he stood exactly in the position he had before occupied.

"Jack," cried Claude, "make haste. 'Bat beick' you

go, what are we to do with these three rascals here? One, I fancy, is quite as bad as the other."

"I have been thinking about that," was the reply. "I think this will do it."

As he spoke, Jack stretched out his hand, and by a sudden jerk pulled down the bell-rope.

Claude knew what he meant instantly, and hastened to assist him. First of all, however, turning the key in the lock of the door, and putting it into his pocket.

It would not then be possible for any one to leave the room in a hurry.

Duval then pulled down the other bell-rope.

By these means they found themselves in possession of about twelve feet of strong cord.

In a great measure, now, Lieutenant Thrustans had succeeded in calming the young girl. He seated her gently in a chair, and then turned to those whose assistance had been so valuable to him.

By their wishes, Koolah was withdrawn from Dr. Stoffel, and put on guard over the man Jarvis.

In fact, the two doctors were past being able to lift a hand in their own defence.

They were tied back to back.

So lightly, too, were the bonds drawn, in order to make it more impossible to get free, that they fairly howled from the pain.

But no one could pity them for enduring that much anguish.

"We must find some means of stopping their noise," said Claude. "Stop a bit; perhaps I shall be able to find a couple of wine corks."

"They will do capital. Try the sideboard yonder."

Claude did so, and in it he found several bottles of what appeared to be wine.

From two of those he extracted the corks.

Despite their opposition they were forced lengthwise into the two doctors' mouths.

They were about as effective gags as could well be imagined.

Their noise was stopped at once.

The question now arose as to what was to be done with Jarvis.

Jack found, however, some cord, which served to loop up the heavy curtains which hung before the windows.

There was not much of it, but still sufficient to bind the man's hands and ankles together.

Another cork was found, and thrust into his mouth.

Having so far disposed of the three villains, our friends between them lifted them up on to the table.

There, if they attempted to move about much, they would be sure to have a fall.

This was all done with inconceivable rapidity.

Poor Kate remained just where she had been placed, but the extraordinary nature of the events taking place around did not tend to decrease her agitation.

When, however, her lover came to her again, and, supporting her with his arm, led her out into the open air, a great change took place.

She was as rational as either of them, but a deathly weakness came over her, and it was only by lifting her in his arms that he prevented her from falling.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING TAKES PLACE.

So light a burden as Katharine now was was nothing to the lieutenant, and he hastened down the gravel path, leading towards the gates, along which Jack and Claude had hurriedly preceded him, in order to afford him an opportunity of saying a few words to his mistress.

"Help! help!" he cried. "Help! She is dying. Help! help!"

Our friends turned round the moment these cries reached their ears, and then they saw the lieutenant running towards them with Katharine in his arms.

"It is only the effect of the night air after having been confined so long. It will be nothing. Follow us through the gates, and we will make our way towards some place where she can receive proper attention. Believe me, I say that all will yet be well."

These words, uttered as they were in a tone expressive of conviction, had their full effect upon the lieutenant, and, kissing again and again the face of his recovered

treasure, he stopped through the little door in the gates into the lane.

Probably five minutes elapsed before Claude and Jack could get the horses ready for service.

Then they mounted.

Lieutenant Thrustans seated his almost inanimate burden upon the saddle before him, holding her tightly to his breast, by means of his right arm.

At a gentle canter they went along the umbrageous lane, they deeming that to be the pace which would be easiest for Katharine.

The young seaman spoke.

His voice was husky with an emotion which did honour to his heart.

"My friends," he said, "for though our acquaintance has been so short, and was so singularly brought about, yet such you have proved yourselves to be, no words or acts could possibly express the extent of my obligation to you. I am indebted to you for my life, and that, without which, I should not care to live. Had it not been for the assistance you have rendered me—the almost preterhuman power you have displayed in unravelling the thread of this most intricate affair, I should never have succeeded as we have."

There was a sensation of pleasure in the hearts of the two highwaymen as these words fell upon their ears. They had the innate consciousness that they were deserved, on this occasion, at least.

"You speak too highly of us," said Claude, "though I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that we have been the means of doing you a service. It has been done with the utmost willingness, has entailed upon us no inconvenience, and if you will believe us, we are rejoiced at the chance we have had of doing good."

"But I must yet further trouble you—still further increase the amount of obligation which I owe you. I am quite in ignorance of this part of the country, so I must get you to direct me to the nearest place where I can find shelter for her."

"It was our intention," replied Jack, "if you would have allowed it, to have taken you to an inn kept by a friend of mine in times gone by. You can trust him. It is, too, not far from here."

"I would not, could not have ventured to ask you to do this, but now you have proposed it it is equally impossible for me to refuse. Lead me there, I beg, and make me still more your debtor."

"I do not wish you to look upon it in that light," said Jack, "and you only embarrass me by doing so. I would rather you took it as a matter of course."

"But I cannot do that. It would be both unfair and unjust."

"Let us, then, say no more about it. Do not, however, think us churlish or ungrateful."

"I can never do that."

"Come on, then. The inn I speak of is not very far from here, and we shall not be long reaching it."

"I am glad of that. Kate—Kate, dearest. Look up. You are saved!"

Poor Katharine Hayward made no reply in words, but by the way in which she clung to him, Rupert knew that she fully comprehended what he said to her.

They emerged in a few more seconds into the high-road.

As they did so, Jack and Claude heard the faint heat of a horse's hoofs.

The former spoke in a whisper to his comrade.

"Claude," he said, "some one comes."

"I hear him."

"I cannot tell any more than you can what emergencies may arise. We have no money."

"Only those coppers."

"Curse the coppers!"

"So say I."

"We have no money. That is a state of things which I can never tolerate. Make some excuse to the lieutenant here for my absence, and I will gallop down the road, and see what traveller it is."

"Agreed."

"There is but one man, so the risk will not be very great."

"Oh! no."

"Very well. The sound seems to grow fainter and

fainter. He must be going towards town. Perhaps if I stay longer I shall not be able to overtake him."

"Be off at once, I will make an excuse to the lieutenant."

"All right. Slacken your speed a little, and I will soon be up with you again."

While this brief dialogue took place, our friends had dropped slightly in the rear.

Keying upon Claude's promise to invent an excuse to the young officer, Jack turned his horse's head, and proceeded at a terrific gallop along the road in the direction of London.

The faint tramp of the horse's hoofs had become quite inaudible when he started, but he soon heard it again.

Presently he came in sight of the horseman, and he reined his horse in to a trot.

All around was made distinctly visible by the moon's rays, and, about a quarter of a mile ahead, he saw a mounted man.

Had such a thing been probable, Jack would have said that the horse he saw was in the last stage of intoxication, for he reeled about in the road in a most extraordinary manner.

Jack became more cautious, but, as he drew yet nearer, he saw that the man on the horse performed in his way quite as curious evolutions.

Our friend hardly knew what to make of so strange a sight. If he wished to learn more, though, the only means by which he could do so would be to ride forward and see.

From what the reader knows of Sixteen-String Jack, he may easily suppose this was just what he did do.

A dozen bounds and he was alongside.

Before he had time to speak, the man on the horse jerked out rather than said—

"In the king's name! Help! I say, I call upon you in the king's name for help! But the reward is mine, recollect. I've found him! I, Aaron Coxhead! Me! I've found him, the reward is mine."

"Found who?" asked Jack, stretching forth his hand and catching the strange horse by the bridle. "Found who?"

The man on horseback held up his hand.

"Do you see that, sir?" he asked. "It's a constable's staff. I call upon you for assistance in the king's name. I am Aaron Coxhead, constable of the parish of Hornsey. I have found Dick Turpin, the highwayman. A thousand pounds reward! He is at the 'Hand and Keys.'"

Jack comprehended all instantly.

The name of Dick Turpin was familiar enough to him.

He was in danger. This fellow evidently, by some means, had learned of his presence in the house of Tom Davis, and had, although quite ignorant of the art of equitation, ventured upon horseback to ride to London for assistance.

Jack shifted his hold from the horse's bridle to the constable's collar.

"Harkye!" he said, "it's all over with you. I am a friend of Dick Turpin's, and sworn foe to all constables and police-officers."

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Not a bit of it. I have no mercy for such as you. There you go!"

Jack fairly dragged him from his horse.

The animal, glad to get rid of so troublesome a rider, galloped back towards Hornsey at full speed.

Now Jack had noticed he had passed over a bridge beneath which flowed a sluggish stream.

Still holding the constable by the collar, much in the same manner as he did Doctor Green, he made his way to this place, and then dropped him over the parapet.

The water was only a few feet off, and he reached it with a tremendous splash.

"That's done," said Jack, "but there's no money. Never mind, I have done Dick a service. At the 'Hand and Keys,' is he?"

He made all speed to regain his companions.

"No luck," he said to Claude, and that was all, for just at that moment they came in sight of a house, from which gleamed a light.

"That is the place," said Jack. How lucky to find them up. Come on."

They rode towards the inn door as he spoke.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

RETURNS TO OUR OLD FRIENDS DICK TURPIN AND TOM DAVIS.

THE many complex and extraordinary incidents which ensued after the hearing of the mysterious sounds in the lane by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, have followed so thickly and closely upon one another, that no opportunity for breaking off the narration has occurred, and therefore we have been unwillingly compelled to lose sight of the doings of the two chief characters in our story.

We mean, of course, Dick Turpin and Tom King.

The former, it will be recollected, was last seen carefully loading his pistols after the imperious summons for admission to the inn.

That it could be visitors at that late hour was considered quite out of the question, and therefore they reasonably enough came to the conclusion that they were Turpin's foes.

Tom Davis did not know what to do. Dick instructed him.

"Open the door," he said.

"Open the door? but suppose they are police?"

"I do suppose it, and consider it the best mode of action."

Tom Davis shook his head, and Ellen, seizing Turpin by the arm, cried—

"No, no, not that; it would be too—too dangerous."

Again came the knocking at the door.

"Open it, Tom," said Dick again, "if they are officers you may depend they have surrounded the house, and made it impossible for me to leave it. Open it, open it."

Thus commanded, and having better faith in Dick's judgment than his own, he went to the front door, and opened it.

"Hullo," said a voice, "is that you, Tom Davis? What an infernal while you have been. Are you grown deaf?"

These words at once let Dick know he had nothing to fear. The tones were certainly not those of a police officer.

Tom Davis opened his mouth and shut it again with an effort.

"God bless me!" he said; "I know that voice, though I haven't heard it lately. Is it really you, Jack?"

"It is Tom."

"Dick," said Davis, "Dick?"

"What is it?"

"Why, there's actually Sixteen-String Jack outside the door."

A cry of astonishment came from Turpin's lips, which was echoed by some one from outside.

It will be seen from this that the inn Jack had spoken was the "Hand and Keys."

The cry of astonishment which echoed Turpin's came from the lips of Lieutenant Thrustans, who was thus suddenly and unexpectedly made aware of the true character of the man to whom he was so deeply indebted.

They had all alighted ere the door was opened. Sixteen-String Jack, and the lieutenant and his burden, entered.

Claude stayed behind to follow Jabez to the stable with the horses, for that worthy had also been aroused by the furious knocking.

Tom Davis hurried them into the room he had just left.

"Your surprise will keep," said Jack, in a low voice to Thrustans. "Katharine now requires all your care. When she is safe, I will explain."

A few moments served to put Ellen and Davis in possession of the principal facts.

Their sympathies were enlisted at once.

Rupert carried Kate upstairs, and laid her gently upon a bed. This done, he left her to Ellen's care.

On re-entering the parlour, he found that he who had been introduced to him as Mr. Engleheart had come in, and that all were talking rapidly and expansively together.

The meeting between the three highwaymen had been a cordial one. Tom Davis, too, was quite as much pleased as any of them.

Jack had just finished relating the story of the constable when Thrustans entered.

Then, of course, the conversation dropped.

Claude and Jack took the young seaman on one side.

"Accident," said the latter, "has made you aware of who we really are. If you will think a moment, you will pardon and understand our motives for not giving you our real names."

Thrustans bowed.

"You have expressed yourself pleased with what you already know of us?"

"Could I be otherwise?"

"That knowledge then proceeds from actual observation; be good enough to remember that you can only have known the rest from hearsay."

The frank-hearted sailor felt this gentle rebuke, and he took the highwaymen's hands in his, as he said—

"I have been unjust. As you say, I ought to have judged you by your actions."

"That is sufficient, and now henceforth we shall be strangers. Do not say a word against it. You will excuse me for speaking plainly, and saying that your friendship, or, at any rate, an outward demonstration of it, can never do us any good, while, on the other hand, it cannot fail to do you harm."

"Never mind," said Thrustans, "I bitterly regret that I should have behaved as I did; but, hang it! I detest sailing under false colours. But you have proved yourselves true friends to me, and, sink me, if I desert you."

The two highwaymen could not fail to be pleased with the manly behaviour of the young sailor, but they were firm in their wish that he should forget them.

He was not, however, to be persuaded.

Ellen had sent Jabez off for a surgeon.

Two things induced Thrustans to quit the apartments.

One was his anxiety respecting Katharine's condition.

The other, the very evident fact that the three highwaymen wished to speak upon matters of their own.

Under the pretence, therefore, of retiring for the night, he withdrew, accompanied by the landlord.

Dick Turpin, Sixteen-String Jack, and Claude Duval were quickly at home with each other.

Davis had taken care to put before them plenty in the shape of refreshment.

As might be anticipated, the conversation turned upon Tom King's imprisonment. It will be remembered Claude and Jack were already acquainted with the fact, having overheard the parsons in the lane speaking about it.

"I will free him," said Dick. "I have sworn it, and I will do it. I care not for obstacles. If I have to pull old Newgate down, stone by stone, he shall be free."

"Well spoken," said Jack, "and if we can aid you in any way command us. Tom was a good comrade of ours, and has done us many a service. It is now our time to do him one in return, and I am glad of it."

"What is your plan?" asked Claude, in his usual quiet way.

"I have none arranged. To tell the truth, that was the very topic that occupied mine and Tom Davis's attention at the moment you arrived."

"It is high time something was agreed upon. Let us see, to-day is Saturday."

"Nearer Sunday," replied Turpin; "it is past twelve."

"And when do the sessions commence?"

"On Wednesday."

"You have not much time for action, then."

"No! That is true."

"However, there is time enough to accomplish a great deal."

Jack then proceeded to relate to his two new friends all those multifarious adventures which followed the capture of Tom King by the dragoons, up to the conversation he had just had with Davis, and with which the reader has already been made acquainted.

To all did they listen with the most profound attention. Not a single circumstance, however minute, was allowed to pass without being fully canvassed.

"And you have seen nothing of him since he had the files?"

"No, nor have I heard anything," replied Dick. "Davis was to go to-morrow."

"Let him do so. Until we receive his report we can do nothing definite. Our best plan will be to wait."

"I think so too."

"Who knows?" said Jack. "Tom King is a brave fellow."

"He is. Few braver."

"Very well. He has tools. Who knows, I say, whether he is or is not at this present moment in the act of achieving his escape?"

"It is possible."

"It is more than possible, it is probable. Others before his time have broken out of the old stone-ing-without half such tools, and why should not he?"

CHAPTER CXXIX.

TAKES A PEEK AT TOM KING IN NEWGATE.

We think we may safely say that there is not one of our readers who does not feel equally anxious with Jack and Claude and Dick, to know whether Tom King really had been able to avail himself of the tools which had been brought to him in so ingenious a manner, under the belief that they would be instrumental in achieving his release.

It is so long since we saw anything of him that it will be necessary to recollect under what circumstances it was that we really did see him.

It was on the occasion of Dick's temerarious visit in the disguise of a farmer.

As soon, then, as the door closed, Tom sprang to his feet, and sought eagerly in the piece of pie-crust, which he had slipped on to the bed so slyly, for the files which Turpin told him were secreted there.

His heart gave quite a sudden bound when he felt in his fingers the thin pieces of spring steel of which the saws were composed.

He did not just then venture to particularly examine them, for fear some one should open the door suddenly, and surprise him.

He looked about him for some place where he might conceal them.

Now Tom was a firm believer in that philosophy which says, "if you want to hide anything securely put it into some conspicuous place," and so he proceeded to act in accordance with it.

His eye rested in a moment upon the grated aperture which admitted the light into the cell, and there he made up his mind to hide them.

"The very thing," he said. "I will just lay them on the stonework, and if they search all the dungeon over, ten to one if they think of looking there."

By standing upon the bed he could not reach the window with the tips of his fingers. However, that was sufficient, and he slipped them on.

Scarcely, however, had he done this, than he heard the sound of voices and footsteps in the corridor without.

He jumped quickly yet silently, off the bed, and ~~snag~~ himself at full length upon it.

Then the door was opened.

Four persons, looking very hot, and very much excited, rushed tumultuously into the cell.

The first was the governor.

The second the chaplain.

The third Winch.

The fourth one of Townshend's men.

Mr. Tapner evidently expected to find something extraordinary, and upon seeing Tom lying down on the bed as if nothing at all was the matter, a look of deep disappointment and vexation appeared upon his face.

King raised himself upon his elbow, and then stood up on his feet.

His surprise was in part real, in part affected.

The dread was at his heart that his comrade had paid dearly for his rashness.

At any rate he could see something had occurred to rouse their suspicions and disturb their equanimity.

He did not trust himself to speak, but waited for his visitors to commence the conversation.

It will be recollected that Mr. Tapner had a bit of a grudge against him, and this animus was shared in by the chaplain.

"Villain!" roared the governor, "infamous villain, what is the meaning of this?"

"It strikes me," replied Tom, "that I ought to ask you that question."

"You ask me? What do you mean? But I'll be even with you. I'll let you know you don't make an enemy of the governor for nothing. You shall suffer for it."

"Suffer for what?" asked a voice; and then, to the great confusion of Mr. Tapner, and equal delight of Tom King, who should walk in but Mr. Sheriff Blandy.

The curses that rose from the heart of the governor to his lips were of the most frightful nature imaginable, but he had sufficient prudence to control the impulse to utter them.

"Suffer for what, Mr. Tapner?" asked the sheriff again, as he walked with a mincing step into the cell. "Suffer for what, did you say?"

We should not be overshooting the mark, we feel sure, if we said that the greatest pleasure of Mr. Blandy's life consisted in teasing the governor. He enjoyed it amazingly.

"Suffer for his crimes, of course," replied Mr. Tapner, recovering a little from his confusion. "And that's what he deserves."

"Oh! indeed. I see. You all seem rather violent."

"Matter! there's enough the matter. Dick Turpin has been here, in this very cell, and had an interview with the prisoner yonder."

Mr. Blandy looked at the speaker incredulous.

"Nonsense!" he said.

"Do you call me a liar, Mr. Blandy?"

"Certainly I do not do so, and yet I might without departing from the truth so much as you do."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Only this. If you have suffered Dick Turpin to come into Newgate, and then allowed him to go out again, all I can say is you cannot have much pretensions to being the governor of a prison."

"But how did I know it?"

"My dear sir."

"Oh! d—n your dear sir. I said, how did I know it?"

"You told me."

"I told you? What do you mean? I said how did I know Dick Turpin had come into Newgate?"

"You told me he had done so, and that is all I know about it."

The governor fairly danced with rage.

"You must calm yourself, Mr. Tapner."

"Allow me, if you please," said the chaplain, stepping forward; "but first I must say that Mr. Tapner has had quite enough to aggravate one of the holy saints."

"H—m! I should not wonder."

"A person dressed as a farmer, and representing himself to be the father of this unrepentant young man, who is, I grieve to say, deeply hardened in iniquity, sought entrance to the prison, and had an interview. Oh! the hypocrisy and guilt of which some people will be guilty. That farmer, Mr. Blandy, was the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin!"

This was the first account the sheriff had had of the affair, and he was naturally amazed.

"We had our suspicions, but in the most daring manner this man of wickedness escaped."

"And what was his object?" asked Mr. Tapner, who thought, perhaps, asking questions was as satisfactory as answering them; "I ask again, what was his motive for coming here?"

"To see his friend, of course," said Tom.

"And give him tools," cried Mr. Tapner; "that's it, search the place, Winch, and you, What's-your-name."

The two officers set about ransacking the place from top to bottom. It was not very large, nor were there many articles in it, so that the search did not occupy a very great deal of time.

Tom was of course overjoyed to hear that Dick had escaped, and he resigned himself with tolerable patience to the result.

The bed and bedstead—although they scarcely deserved the name—were pulled to pieces and thoroughly examined, but of course nothing was found.

Then, having in fine searched every portion or the cell itself, with the exception of the place in which they were hidden, they commenced to search Tom's person.

They would have done this at first if they had had any



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS STOP THE TRAVELLER ON THE NORTH ROAD.]

the files were concealed about him, but now they resorted to it as a kind of forlorn hope.

Tom submitted to the search willingly enough.

They could not, of course, be positive that Tom had received any tools, and Winch, for his own credit's sake, swore stoutly that the thing was impossible, for not only had he searched the seeming farmer before he entered the cell, but was present during the whole of the interview, and they could not have been passed from one to another without his knowledge.

This of course was not true, but Winch was not afraid to say it was. The only person who was in a position to contradict it was Tom King, and it was not very likely he could do so.

Well, we're baffled, it seems," said the governor, when the men had thoroughly satisfied themselves that Tom had the files nowhere concealed about him. "We're baffled, but we will make sure—of course with your permission, Mr. Sheriff Blandy." Here Mr. Tapner made a low bow of respect, and turning to Tom, addressed himself to

him: "We know you have no tools about you, but we are not quite so sure that there are not some cunningly hidden in the cell; and as a measure of precaution—ha! ha!—we'll remove you to another cell."

"I protest against this!" cried Tom King; "I protest against it. Mr. Sheriff, I appeal to you. It is to your interference that I owe my present comfort, and now he seizes upon this pretext to deprive me of it. Oh! it is monstrous, and I hope, Mr. Blandy, that you will not allow him to set your authority at naught."

"He! he!" gasped the governor, in an hysterical tone of voice; "That touches him. I declare my conviction that the prisoner has tools secreted somewhere in this cell, and I declare it my duty to remove him to some other place, as a precautionary measure. He! he! Oppose me at your peril, Mr. Blandy!"

"I do not for a moment dream of doing any such thing, Mr. Tapner, and you know it. Having such an impression on your mind, you are unquestionably right in ordering the prisoner to be removed; and it will be my duty to see

you, should circumstances make it necessary for me to do so."

Mr. Tapner was terribly disappointed when he heard this speech. He cherished the hope that the pragmatic sheriff would oppose him, and then he would have something like ground to stand upon against him.

He was at a loss what to say, and Mr. Blandy, who, in his way, was a very good sort of fellow, and unquestionably the means of preventing a great deal of ill usage from being visited upon the prisoners, continued—

"Give your orders, Mr. Tapner. You have my full sanction, sir; but I shall make it my business to see that when you change his cell you put him into one which is fit for a fellow-creature to remain in."

"Oh! very good. Of course, Mr. Sheriff, you are the governor of the prison, and I am a fool!"

"You are right there, if you are not in the first part of your sentence."

"Sir?"

"Oh! don't fume. You called yourself a fool—I didn't; bear that in mind."

Mr. Tapner saw he had got the worst of it, so, turning his back contemptuously upon his tormentor, he said—

"Winch, bring the rascal this way! Bring him along, and keep a sharp eye upon him. He may think to es cape, but he won't, no matter how much *certain persons* may connive at such a thing!"

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE TAKES MOST EFFECTIVE STEPS TO PREVENT TOM KING'S ESCAPE.

MR. TAPNER placed a most withering emphasis upon the words *certain persons*, and turned upon the sheriff a glance which he intended should speak volumes.

But that gentleman, conscious how baseless the insinuation was, disdained to take the slightest notice of it, which mortified Mr. Tapner more than words could have done.

Despite his rather ticklish situation, Tom King could not fail to be diverted with the little scene that was enacted before him.

His vexation that he should thus be deprived of the means of escape was great in the extreme, but he could not help himself, nor was he clever enough to invent some plan by which he could defeat the intentions of the governor.

Yet it is more than probable that he would have hit upon some scheme if he had been able to concentrate his ideas, but the interest and enjoyment he felt in what was going forward prevented his doing so.

There was nothing for him to do but submit to being placed in some other dungeon. Resistance he knew would only have furnished an excuse to the governor for his ill-treatment, without his obtaining the least advantage as compensation for it.

Winch took hold of him by one arm, and Townshend's man by another, and led him into the passage.

Mr. Blandy preceded them, and Mr. Tapner and the chaplain brought up the rear.

"Where shall I put him, sir?" asked Winch.

But for the presence of the sheriff, the governor would have replied, "the darkest and dampest dungeon in all Newgate." As it was, he gave orders for him to be placed in a similar cell to the one he had occupied, which was situated on the opposite side of the passage.

The door was swung open by Winch, and the whole party entered.

Tom looked keenly about him, in order to find, if he could, some ground for complaint; but he could not. It was quite as comfortable as the one he had left.

Mr. Blandy, too, looked round the place; observing which, the governor sneeringly inquired whether he was satisfied with the accommodation.

That was the only bit of revenge he could treat himself with, and, natrly as it was, Mr. Tapner chuckled over it.

But Tom stepped forward, and what he said rather turned the tables.

"Mr. Blandy," said Tom, addressing that gentleman, "until I became an inmate of this prison we were perfect strangers. To my knowledge, we had never seen each other before, and yet you, at the expense of a great deal

of personal abuse, have been kind enough to take ray part, and as I firmly believe, save me from a great deal of ill treatment. For all this I can only tender you my very best and most sincere thanks; and as I can offer you nothing further, I beg you will accept them, prompted as they are by the feeling of deep gratitude which I experience for what you have been pleased to consider it your duty to do in my behalf."

This was a speech for which no one there present was exactly prepared, and certainly none less so than the sheriff himself, who, in the confusion of the moment, managed to stammer out some words of acknowledgment to Tom.

Then Tom bowed, and retired to the most distant corner of the cell.

"Really," said the Sheriff, "there must be some mistake; the fellow is a perfect gentleman!"

"Oh! its very fine—very fine indeed!" said Mr. Tapner, shrugging his shoulders. "Its quite affecting to hear you. However, I'm going. Perhaps you would like to stay with the prisoner, Mr. B.?"

"No," said the Sheriff; "I shall at once proceed to the Secretary of State, and lay before him a full account of what I have witnessed here at various times, and ask him candidly whether he considers you to be a proper person to be left in charge of a prison."

"Ha! ha!" said Mr. Tapner. "Ha! ha! come along Winch."

But though he strove to laugh it off, he did not at all succeed in doing so, and it required very little discernment to perceive that it made him very ill at ease.

As for Tom, to tell the truth he was not a little pleased when they all departed and left him to the solitude of his dungeon.

He listened to the dull echo of their footsteps along the corridor until he heard a door closed.

Then all was silent—so silent, that one would scarcely credit Newgate was in the heart of the huge, bustling City of London.

Evening was coming on.

The light that straggled through the grated, unglazed window of the cell grew duller and duller every moment.

Folding his arms across his breast, Tom paced up and down his cell.

At every step he took his fetters clanked dismally against each other.

They had, too, the effect of making walking a difficult and tiring exercise, but Tom King's mind was too restless to allow him to sit still.

In that silent place the sound even of his own voice was cheerful to him, and so he spoke his thoughts aloud.

"Confusion light on the officious governor," he said, "but for him, I should now be making use of those tools my friend ran such a fearful risk to convey to me. Thank heaven, though, he has not paid the penalty due to his rashness. He has escaped, or I should long ere this have heard of his recapture."

There was some consolation in this thought, and Tom grew calmer.

"Its no good grieving over shed milk," he said. "I must bid good-bye to the files, and be on the alert to take advantage of any little circumstance that may arise. I shall not despair yet."

As he uttered these words, the last ray of light faded from the dungeon, leaving him in profound darkness.

He made his way to the rude pallet which was to serve for his bed, and stretched himself at full length upon it.

"To-day," he said, after a brief interval of silence, "or rather to-night, is Saturday. To-morrow will be Sunday. The sessions I suppose will begin on Wednesday, as usual. I wonder whether I shall be put upon my trial, or whether Dick will, between now and then, put me in the way of making my escape. But why should I not make the attempt, and rely entirely upon my own exertions?"

will do it!"

But scarcely had he come to this conclusion, and before he had time to rise from his recumbent position, than he heard the door at the end of the corridor unlocked.

It might be the turnkeys about to visit some of the other prisoners.

He waited, and listened.

But such did not prove to be the case. The turnkeys paused upon the threshold of his own dungeon.

"Confound it," he cried. "Can it be that rascally governor come to torment me? If so"—
 an opening of the door put a stop to his speech.
 There was the governor, sure enough, and Winch as well.

Behind them stood two other men.

"Oh! there you are, prisoner," said Mr. Tapner, as the light of the lantern Winch carried showed him Tom King lying calmly on the bed, "there you are, and there I'll take care you stop. You've got the idea into your head that you will be able to make your escape. But, ha! ha! I'll try if I can't beat one too many for you, my fine fellow. Ha! ha!"

"If it affords you pleasure to annoy me," said Tom King, raising himself upon one arm, "I have no resource but to submit. Let me warn you, however, to be careful, for I shall make Mr. Blandy acquainted with your proceedings."

"D—n Mr. Blandy, and you and all!" cried the governor, his rage getting the better of him, "D—n Mr. Blandy, and all the world!"

Tom laughed at Mr. Tapner's impotent passion.

"Very good," he said, "Curse who you like, I don't suppose it will make much difference."

By a great effort the governor controlled his temper.

"Harkye!" he said, "you have yet to find what are the consequences of making the governor of Newgate your enemy."

"I don't value you a rush, nor your enmity either."

"Well, we shall see. You think of making your escape, but you won't find it a very easy matter, I can tell you. I'm not going to put you in a stronger cell, nor put more jewellery on your person, but I shall just leave you where you are."

"Thank you for nothing," said Tom. "I suppose that's because you can't put me anywhere else."

The governor's choler began to rise again, but he managed in a strange fashion to turn it into a laugh.

But such a laugh!

"You stay where you are, but not alone. Ha! ha! do you hear? Not alone! ha! ha! Wilson and Biggs will share the cell with you. What do you think of that? Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER CXXXI.

TOM KING MAKES RATHER A STARTLING PROPOSITION TO MR. WILSON AND MR. BIGGS.

SETTING aside the offensive manner in which this announcement was made, it was about as disagreeable a thing as could well come to Tom's ears.

All hope of making even the slightest attempt to escape vanished in a moment.

It is not a part of our plan to withhold from any one that which is their due, and therefore we cannot refrain from complimenting Mr. Tapner for hitting upon this means of making sure his prisoner should not slip through his fingers.

The two men, who had been named respectively Biggs and Wilson, upon being called by the governor, at once entered the cell.

They each carried with them a small three-legged stool to sit upon.

Satisfaction beamed from the countenance of Mr. Tapner as he rubbed his hands briskly together.

"That's a stopper for you, I know. Ha! ha! You carried on pretty well, but you see I don't intend for you to have all your own way. Oh! dear no! quite the reverse."

"If you think to aggravate me into assaulting you you are very much mistaken. I am not going to commit myself in any such way. As for your petty malice, I treat it with that contempt it so well deserves."

"Assault me! Look to your weapons, my men. He's a desperate character, and there is no knowing what he may not attempt to do. All you have got to do, however, is to see that he does not escape, and defend yourselves if necessary."

"All right, sir," said Biggs; "leave him to us; we'll take care on him!"

"Do so, and you'll find it won't be the worst night's work you ever did. I would sooner have my right hand chopped off than he should escape!"

"Don't you be afraid of that, sir. When you're gone I'll put my stool agin the door, and lean my back against it. Then Jim, he'll look arter the cove as well."

"That will do. Ha! ha! Let Mr. Blandy say anything against that, if he can! I only hope he will. Ha! ha! How do you like it, you villain?"

Tom King resolutely closed his lips, and turned over on his bed, so that his face was towards the wall. No provocation, he determined, should make him assault Mr. Tapner, which was evidently what that individual wished him to do.

Mr. Tapner waited a moment or two, and then finding Tom still preserved silence, he waved his hand to Winch, and stalked from the cell.

According to his expressed intention, Mr. Biggs, so soon as the door was closed, put his stool against it and sat down.

Wilson took up his position near the foot of the prisoner's bed.

Both then drew from their coat pockets a brace of double-barrelled pistols, and carefully assured themselves that the charges were in proper order, and the weapons ready for immediate service.

They had also provided themselves with a piece of lighted candle, which they stuck against a projection of the wall.

It shed a dubious twilight over the cell.

Some minutes passed in silence, Tom still maintaining the same position.

Messrs. Biggs and Wilson had lighted their pipes, and were smoking away at a great rate.

It was not possible, however, for them to long continue silent. They had nothing whatever to occupy their minds.

"I say, Biggs," said Wilson.

"Yes, mate."

"I takes it as being very hard lines we should be put upon such duty as this 'ere without bein' allowed summat to drink."

"So do I; but its just like 'em! I wonder they don't deprive us of our blessed bakker!"

"I couldn't nohow stand that. Its right awful to think on! I often wonders what a poor fellow would do without his pipe."

A pause ensued, during which it might be inferred that the two worthies were speculating upon the knotty point mentioned.

Tom moved.

The men were on the alert instantly.

"My friends," said Tom, who raised himself slowly up and sat on the edge of the bed, "it seems we are going to pass the night together?"

"I rather s'poses we is!"

"Then there's no reason why we shouldn't come to an understanding and pass the time pleasantly, is there?" said Tom.

"Not as I knows on," said Wilson; "what do you say, Biggs?"

"Not if the gentleman's agreeable."

"Very well, then," said Tom, "that's settled, for if I had not been agreeable, I should not have asked you. But do you really mean to say they don't allow you anything to drink?"

"Not a blessed drop!" said Biggs.

"Not a blessed drop!" repeated Wilson, with additional emphasis.

"Then I don't envy you your job," said King.

"I dare say not; but then you see *duty is duty*."

"But not pleasure."

"You're right enough there!"

"Well, now, look here," said Tom, "just listen to me a moment; I've got something particular I want to say to you."

"Go on then, we is all attention; ain't we, Jim?"

"We is."

"Then come a little nearer."

"Why? No one can't overhear us."

"I don't know that; but I want to make sure. Come close here, and then I shall not have to speak so loud as you."

"No tricks?"

"No!"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said Tom, emphatically.

"Very well, then, what have you got to say?"

As they asked this question, the two men rather dubiously he said, neared the bed.

"Sit down," said Tom. "You can sit on one side, and you on the other. You will be able to keep me as safe then as now."

The two jailers were full of curiosity to know what Tom had to say, so they sat down; besides which they thought it would be their best policy to humour their prisoner as much as possible, and so make matters as pleasant as they could.

To tell the truth, too, they felt rather flattered at Tom's condescension; for in those days a high tobyman, as highwaymen were called, were something more than ordinary mortals.

But from what the reader knows of Tom King, he feels sure that he is doing all this with some ultimate object in view.

What it was will be very quickly seen.

"As I said," he began, "yours is a very disagreeable job, now what do you get for it?"

"Eh?"

"I mean how much are you paid?"

"Do you mean extra?"

"Yes."

"Not a blessed mag!"

"What? is it possible that this night duty goes in along with your ordinary work?"

"There's not no mistake about it."

"And they won't let you have anything to drink?"

"Not a spot."

"Then all I can say is, its scandalous. The idea of putting you on dangerous duty like this, and giving you nothing extra for it, is out of the bounds of all reason."

"Old Tapper ain't a giving sort," said Biggs.

"But," said Wilson, "you didn't ask us to come and sit close to you to ask us such a question as that."

"No, I didn't."

"What was it then?"

"You shall hear, only I was obliged to introduce my subject, you know."

"Oh, in course."

"Very well then. Now, I hope you will pay the most particular attention to what I am going to say."

"Oh, go on," said Wilson, "don't keep us in suspense."

"I loses all patience," said Biggs.

"But the question I am going to ask you is a very important one."

"Let's hear it then."

"If you get nothing for keeping me a prisoner here, beyond your regulars, how much should you say would make it worth your while to let me free, or put me in the way of making my escape? Don't be afraid to speak, I can afford a good price."

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE TWO MEN ON GUARD ARE DAZZLED BY THE OFFERS OF THE PRISONER.

Biggs looked at Wilson.

Wilson looked at Biggs.

"Don't decide hastily," said Tom. "Take your time to consider. I'm in no hurry. What do you say?"

Biggs slowly shook his head.

So did Wilson.

"Surely," cried Tom, with affected astonishment, "you don't mean to say you decline."

"We does," said the two jailers, with a sigh.

"Oh! stuff. Name your price."

"It won't do," said Biggs.

"Not but what its hard to see the chance of money go by you, but it won't do."

"Not by no means. You've tried that dodge on afore, Mr. King."

"Eh?"

"I say you've tried that dodge on afore. Do you recollect Jacks and Bishop?"

Tom did recollect them.

They were the men he had tempted to relieve him, by promising them a hundred pounds apiece for their trouble. "In course he recollects them. We knows all about that, and how you told 'em a lot of lies about two hundred

and fifty pounds being hidden in the sewer. But we old birds ain't caught with chaff."

"But look here," said Tom.

"Save your breath. Jacks and Bishop looked like a couple of fools, as they was, and what is the result?"

"Why, they are lagged," said Wilson, replying to his companion's question, "and will be put on their trial this very session."

Tom was rather nonplussed, but he recovered himself and returned to the charge in a moment.

Although there was little prospect of success, yet it was the only thing he had that looked at all like a chance, and so he was bound to try his best with it.

Curbing his impatience, he went on—

"You have not heard the rights of the story," he said.

"That is what they told you. If they had not been treacherous they would have received the money all fair and square. What they wanted to do, however, was to get hold of the two hundred and fifty pounds and take me back just the same."

"Is that a fact?"

"Of course it is!"

"Well, then, all I can say, it serves them right. Don't you, Biggs?"

"I does."

"Treachery never fails to meet with its due reward. Now, my friends, if you will listen to me, I will tell you the truth, without any lies, and if you like to say yes to my proposal, why, well and good."

"Shall we hear it, Biggs?" asked Wilson, as usual, of his companion.

"I think so."

"It can't do no harm, can it? 'Cos you see we isn't bound to accept it."

"Certainly not, Jim."

"Then, Mr. Tom King, we'll just listen to what you've got to say, if you'll only act on the square."

"You must do so too."

"We shall be sure to do that, provided you don't try on no tricks."

"And I shan't be foolish enough to tamper with my safety for the sake of doing so, I can tell you!"

"Well, what are you going to say?"

"I'll tell you without any bother."

The two men got closer to Tom, being full of impatience to know what he was going to say, for they could tell from his manner that it was something serious, and important at the same time.

"I am going to tell you something that I intended to keep always locked in my own breast. In the first place, you must know, then, that I was going through a wood some distance from London. It was night, and very dark."

"And who was your companion?" asked Wilson.

"Well, it won't matter if I tell you, the fact is, it was Dick Turpin."

"I thought so!"

"But that doesn't matter to my story. I say we were going through a wood at night, when, all of a sudden, we saw a light appear before us in the darkness."

"A light?"

"Yes; strange as it may seem, we saw a light, but that was not all, this light kept moving about in a most extraordinary manner. Sometimes we saw it, and sometimes we didn't, till at last it disappeared among the trees."

"My eye!" said Biggs, "weren't you skeared?"

"What?"

"Frightened like?"

"Oh! no, not at all, only curious."

"Ah! well, I should have been skeared. I never was in a wood but once in my life, and, if I knows it, it is the last time I ever shall be; but never mind that, go on."

Tom was well pleased to see that the story he began telling, and with the exact particulars of which the reader is acquainted, awoke so much interest in their breasts, so that they seemed to lose sight of his object in telling them the adventure.

"Yes, go on," said Wilson. "I goes above all things like to hear a downright good tale, specially if its true."

"Well, then, this is true, every word of it, and so, to go on with what I was saying, when the mysterious light disappeared we consulted together for a moment, and then resolved to find out what it was."

"Did you really?"

"We did, and went on and on among the trees, which grew closer and closer together at every step we took. We thought at first that it must be a will o' the wisp."

"A will o' the wisp?" said Wilson. "What's that, Biggs?"

"Don't know!"

"I will tell you, then," said Tom. "It is a curious kind of light, which sometimes rises out of the earth in damp places, and goes flitting about here, there, and everywhere."

"Why, he means a Jack a lantern!" cried Biggs. "I knows what that is!"

"So do I"

"It is only another name for the same thing," replied Tom.

"Well, you thought it was a Jack a lantern. What next?"

"We found it wasn't that, for when we put our ears on the ground to listen, we distinctly heard a footstep, and the sound of some one forcing a way through the gorse bushes."

"It was a man with a lantern, then."

"Just so. But no sooner had we made this discovery than the light disappeared altogether."

"Did it, though?"

"We waited a good while for it to reappear, but without result, so we crept forward again, and at last we reached a kind of dell, and down at the bottom of this dell there we saw the light again."

"What was it?"

"A lantern! We crept as close as we could to the edge of the dell, and then we heard some one digging. The sound of a spade turning up earth came to us as plain as could be."

"And couldn't you see nothing?"

"No; but I found a sort of narrow winding path leading down into the dell, so as carefully and silently as we were able, we made our way down it."

The two men got still closer to Tom, in their intense eagerness to hear what was coming next. They were so absorbed with the peculiar narrative that they could think of nothing else.

"When we got to the bottom," continued Tom, assuming an awestruck tone of voice. "When we got to the bottom, we were able to see, by the light of the lantern, a man, who appeared to be digging a grave!"

"A grave?" gasped Biggs.

"That was what we thought it was."

"And what sort of a man was he?"

"Oh! a very old man, with only some tattered rags clinging about his person, to serve as clothes, and he was so thin and so bent, that you would never have believed he had strength enough to walk, let alone dig a hole in the ground. He went on with his work for some time, and then stopped and spoke. From what he said, we gathered that he had concealed a large box of gold, but now he came to dig for it he could not find it. He fancied he had not dug deep enough, and went to work ten times harder than before. His curses were awful when he found that his treasure had gone. He got out of the pit and stood on the margin of it, and called down the vengeance of heaven upon the head of the robber, and while the words were upon his lips, Dick and myself were startled by hearing the loud report of a gun, and then we saw the old miser, for such he was, fall headlong and bleeding into the hole!"

CHAPTER CXXIII.

MR. TAPNER MAKES A VERY SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION.

"Well, I'm blest!" ejaculated Biggs. "It clean bangs all I ever heard on!"

"That it do!" said Wilson, "its the best of all! Let us hear what happened next."

"I will."

The two men again assumed their eager listening attitude.

Tom could not help smiling slightly.

But in reality it was not at all to be wondered at that the men felt the interest they did. Its startling character was well qualified to elicit it.

"Our astonishment," continued Tom, "when we heard the shot, and saw the old man fall into the pit was, as you may think, very great indeed, and it was the greatest wonder in the world we did not do or say something to betray our presence in that lonely spot, but we happened to possess sufficient self command to keep perfectly still, and we soon had cause to congratulate ourselves for having done so, for in a moment or two we heard the ground crush beneath the tread of a heavy footstep."

"Lor!"

"We watched and waited, and presently we saw a rough-looking man, with a hideous countenance, come close up to the pit. He looked closely into it, in order to find out, as I take it, whether the old man was really dead, and then we heard him say something about the miser's treasure, which made us think he had stolen it."

"Oh! do go on."

"We pounced upon him, and tied him up to the tree; and now," said Tom, turning to the two men, and speaking in a most impressive tone of voice, "now comes the most interesting part of my story."

"What?—what?—oh! what?"

"Let me get my breath! When we had done that we looked all round about the dell, to see if we could find the miser's box of gold."

"Ye-es—yes!"

"For a long time we were unsuccessful, but at last, just on the very brink of the dell, there we found a box carefully bound round with iron. It was about four feet long by three in width and depth."

"And—and?"

"That was the box containing the miser's treasure."

"You don't say so. Oh! Jim, how many guineas would a box of that size hold?"

"Oh! heaps upon heaps upon heaps!"

"And it would sure to be all gold—no notes, you know."

"Not a bit of it. Trust a miser for that."

"When we found it," said Tom.

"Yes, when you found it?"

"We carried it to some distance, and then dug a hole at the foot of a tree, and buried it."

"You did?"

"Most certainly we did."

"And you never opened it to look inside?"

"No, we could not, for the officers were after us, and we had something to do to make our escape."

"And is the box there now?"

"Yes, I could put my hand upon it; and that brings me to what I was going to propose. There is enough gold in that box to make an immense fortune for both of you. Now if you like to let me out, or help me to get out, I will give you my most solemn word of honour, and take any oath you may think fit to impose, that I will lead you direct to the spot where the treasure is hidden, and you shall have it all. Come, what do you say? Is it a bargain?"

This was an offer of so brilliant a description that the two men were quite dazzled with it.

Scarcely was it to be expected that they would for long hold out from embracing so tempting a proposal.

And, to speak the truth, Tom King was fully in earnest in what he said, and so the men felt sure he was, from his very manner.

Nevertheless, they spent some few moments in close consultation.

"Come!" cried Tom, impatiently, "if you are going to say yes, say it. You won't have such another chance for making your fortunes if you live a thousand years."

"Well, we say agreed," cried Wilson; "don't we Biggs?"

"We do!"

"Then!" exclaimed Tom exultingly, as he sprang to his feet, "then I shall be once more free! free to see!"

"A change in your guard," said a voice, and Mr. Tapner, the governor, put his head into the cell.

The surprise which this sudden appearance caused, made the three inmates of the cell for a moment quite speechless.

Messrs. Biggs and Wilson at length found breath enough to utter a dismal yell, and then they sank to the floor in an agony of apprehension.

Mr. Tapner, his whole face beaming with the most intense delight, came quite into the cell, closely followed by Winch and two other men.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, "I told you I should be a match for you. Thought, by telling a lot of stuff about buried treasures, to get free, did you? Ha! ha! Didn't think I might be listening through the keyhole to all you said! You omitted that in your calculations. Dear me! how funny that the governor of Newgate should be clever enough to outwit Tom King, the notorious highwayman. Sounds quite ridiculous. Ha! ha!"

Winch and the two men loudly echoed the governor's disagreeable laugh.

As for Tom King, his vexation knew no bounds, but he would not suffer it to become visible, and so afforded the governor that additional satisfaction.

But the two men rose to their feet, and fawningly approached Mr. Tapner.

"Take those men prisoners!" he cried.

"Lor' bless you, Mr. Tapner, I hope as how you won't do no such thing, sir," said Wilson. "Don't you hope so, Biggs?"

"In course I does!"

"Why, you see, sir, we only pertended to listen to his artfulness; and the moment we seed you, sir, we should have told you all about it. We should, sir. Shouldn't we, Biggs?"

"I knows I should."

"Its all very well, but that lame tale won't do," said the governor. "Oh! dear no! Why you actually consented. Don't deny it, because I heard it with my own ears."

"We don't intend to deny it, Mr. Tapner."

"Then you consented?"

"No, no! we only pertended to consent. I'll take my solemn oath we only pertended to consent. Won't you, Biggs?"

"To be sure! So help my Davy, and no gammon! we only pertended to consent, in order to find out more about it."

"You hear Biggs, Mr. Tapner?"

"I do hear him."

"And you believe us, sir?"

"I believe you to be a couple of infamous scoundrels, and I'll have you locked up on the charge of assisting the prisoner to escape."

"No, no, Mr. Tapner; indeed we only pertended."

But the governor turned a deaf ear to their protestations, and turning to Winch, said—

"Go to the lobby, and bring a couple of men to take them prisoners and lock them up."

Then when Winch returned, which he did in a few minutes, for the distance he had to go was short, he had Messrs. Biggs and Wilson walked off, and he left two other men in the dungeon in their places.

"Don't listen to the rubbish he will try to pour into your ears. Its moonshine, every bit of it! But I'll have you so closely watched that it will be impossible for you to escape!"

"Trust to us, Mr. Tapner. We won't listen."

"That's best. What do you think now, Mr. Tom King? I would tell the sheriff if I was you. Ha! ha!"

But Tom turned away, disdainful to reply to the taunts levelled at him either by word or gesture.

Finding this to be the case, the governor, after a few of what, as he afterwards called them when speaking to the chaplain about them, cutting remarks, he left the cell, and the door was closed after him.

Tom King had no heart to say anything to his new guards, so he threw himself upon the hard bed and strove to sleep.

So passed the night.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN FIND OUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISREGARDING THE ADVICE CONTAINED IN AN OLD PROVERB.

ABOUT ten o'clock on the following—that is to say, Sunday morning—two persons well known to the readers of this history entered out of Skinner-street into the Old Bailey.

One was a man of jovial appearance and extraordinary proportions.

The other was a being so dissimilar to him in every

respect that people, when they saw them together, would hardly be able to believe they belonged to the same race.

She was a young girl—small, and very ably made, with hands and feet that might be a child's.

Her hand rested on the arm of this big man, and as they were so close together it made the difference in their relative sizes the more apparent.

Of course our readers recognise them.

One was Tom Davis, the worthy landlord of the "Hand and Keys."

The other Ellen, once the poor orphan apprentice, now his adopted daughter.

His errand was to visit Tom King, and deliver the message he had been charged with for him.

As for Ellen, her presence may be easily accounted for.

She had asked to come, and Tom never thought of doing otherwise than granting her slightest wish.

And so on this Sunday morning, just as the clock in the belfry of St. Sepulchre's church was striking ten, they came in sight of the gloomy old prison of Newgate.

They crossed over the Old Bailey, and Tom, ascending the little flight of steps, rapped rather imperiously upon the wicket.

The consequence was it was opened at once.

But the man on the lock, when he saw they were only visitors, had half a mind to bang the door shut in their faces, and likely enough would have had a whole mind, had not Davis taken care to make an entrance as soon as it was open.

"Well, I'm blest! what is things a coming to next, I wonder?"

"Let me have none of your insolence," said Davis, "or you will find yourself in trouble. Where's the governor? I want to see him, immediately."

"Jinks!" growled the man on the lock, "go and tell Mr. Tapner he's wanted."

Now, to the reader it may seem rather strange that Davis should ask to see the governor, instead of asking to see Tom King; but the fact was, he knew that without he adopted some very clever stratagem, he would not, after what had occurred, be able to see the prisoner at all.

He had a scheme already, and the reader will see what it is as things go on.

In a short time the governor came into the lobby, through a door that led to his own private apartments in the prison.

He was curious to know who it was that wanted him.

He looked rather surprised upon seeing Davis and Ellen, both of whom were strangers to him, but the former hastened to say, in the politest manner he was master of—

"The governor of the prison, I presume?"

"Yes," said Mr. Tapner; "and as I am rather busy, perhaps you will be good enough to let me know what it is you want with me in as few words as possible."

"Certainly, certainly, oh! certainly. The fact is I have made a rather long journey up from the country solely upon the business I have with you."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. About two months ago, I ought to tell you, I was driving along the Southampton-road with my daughter here, when we were stopped and robbed by a highwayman, who I have reason to believe was Tom King."

"Dear me, yes; and you have come up to London, I suppose, to bring forward your case against him. Just so. Be good enough to walk this way."

So saying, he conducted Davis and Ellen to a comfortably-furnished parlour, the window of which looked into the Old Bailey.

In the strong feeling he had against Tom he was rejoiced to find some real *bona fide* evidence against him, such as this appeared to be. It saved him a great deal of trouble, for it had been his intention to go to the length of getting up a case against him.

"Getting up a case," in the way the governor used the words, meant suborning evidence.

He was saved the trouble—and, what was more, the risk—but he was so exasperated with Tom, that he made up his mind to have no more to do with his conviction.

Mr. Tapner placed seats for Ellen and Davis, and then sat down himself at a desk covered with papers, and

taking up a pen, prepared to take notes of the statement about to be made to him.

"Now, sir," he said.

"You must understand," said Davis, "that one of my chief objects in coming up and bringing my daughter with me was to see the prisoner, for on the occasion we both had a good look in the face of the man who robbed us, and we should be able to tell directly whether Tom King was really that man."

"Oh! of course, of course. You shall see him at once."

"Perhaps," suggested Davis, "I had better, to save all trouble, see the prisoner before I make the statement, for if he should not turn out to be the man, why, of course, the matter will rest there."

"Just as you like, sir—just as you like. I am glad to find some one else besides myself anxious to further the ends of justice. I have no doubt the prisoner is the man who robbed you—no doubt in the world."

"One glance will be sufficient to assure us of that, will it not, Ellen?"

"Yes, father."

"Come with me, then," said the governor. "As you wish it, you shall see the prisoner first, and if you recognise him, make the statement afterwards."

"Just so."

The two now rose, and the governor, having called Winch, they proceeded in a body to Tom's cell.

Davis, while the turnkey was unlocking and opening the door, put his hand into his coat-pocket, where he had a letter folded up into a very small compass.

He had another difficult task to perform, and that was to place the letter in Tom King's hands unseen.

He took his hand out of his pocket, and held it between his fingers. So small was it that it could not be seen.

Then, as soon as the door was opened, he saw Tom, and managed, by the expression of his countenance, that he did not wish to be recognised.

King took the hint, and assumed a surprise at the visit.

"Now," said Mr. Tapner, "take a good look, and tell me whether you think that is him."

Davis walked into the cell, and looked at Tom. Then he shook his head.

"Look again," said Mr. Tapner.

"In the most natural manner, Davis put up his hand and touched Tom King on the shoulder, as though to turn his face more fully to the light.

Then, with the quickness of thought, he slipped the tiny piece of paper down Tom's neck, and said, suddenly, in a whisper—

"A letter."

"Is this the man?" asked the governor.

"No," said Davis, "I shouldn't like to swear it was, but my daughter will look, if you please."

"Oh! ah! Look at him, my dear. Is that the man who robbed you on the Southampton road?"

"No, I am quite sure it isn't."

"It isn't."

"No, the man that robbed us had large sandy whiskers, and his eyes were different, and he was taller and stouter. Oh! I am sure it isn't the same."

At this moment one of the men who had been watching in the cell touched Mr. Tapner on his arm and whispered something in his ear which made the governor's face assume quite a blue tinge.

"Is it possible?" he cried, "Arrest those people, and confine them in separate dungeons at once. Away with them. I charge them with being accomplices of the prisoner."

CHAPTER CXXXV.

THE MAGISTRATE AT BOW-STREET GIVES TOM DAVIS A CAUTION.

Davis had seen the man whisper, and guessed in a moment that he was known.

Still he resolved to put a bold front on the matter.

"What do you mean, sir," he said, "by accusing my daughter and myself with being the accomplices of highwaymen? Take care what you are doing, sir, and mind what you say, for you shall prove your words."

"I am quite ready, Mr. Thomas Davis, quite ready.

You see I know your name. Powell, here, is ready to swear you are the landlord of a public-house well known as the resort of desperate characters."

"You are dreaming, sir; I am no public-house keeper, but a farmer, and I live at Lymington."

The confident tone in which this assertion was uttered staggered the governor a great deal, so he turned to Powell and said—

"Will you swear that man is Davis, the landlord of the 'Hand and Keys'?"

"Will I? Of course I will. You might just as well ask me to swear whether I was ever in Newgate?"

"You are quite certain, then?"

"Quite."

"That is sufficient, then. It is my duty to take both into custody."

"This is monstrous."

"You will have every opportunity afforded you of proving your identity before the magistrate to-morrow morning at Bow-street. Off with them."

It was useless to resist, so Davis suffered them to lead him to a cell.

Ellen was terribly frightened, but her adopted father soon reassured her, and told her she had nothing whatever to fear.

"Search your prisoner," cried Mr. Tapner, as soon as they had left the cell. "Although I had my eye upon them all the while, yet it is possible something may have been given to him. Search the prisoner at once."

The two men sprang forward, and in a very rapid and dexterous manner searched him from head to foot.

But they found nothing.

How was it, then, that the letter escaped their practised observation?

We will explain.

As soon as Tom heard the governor proclaim who Davis really was, he judged that a search would be the result.

Therefore, while the attention of the governor and the men was chiefly centred in the landlord and Ellen, Tom managed slyly, and without attracting notice, to put his hand up to his neck and take out the letter.

It rested just between the neckband of his shirt and his skin.

Having it now in his grasp, the next thing was to find some safe place in which to secrete it.

He was at a loss for a moment, and then feeling how small it was, for he did not venture to look, he slipped it into his mouth.

The letter had been written on a long slip of paper about an inch and a half wide, and was rolled up tightly, and secured at the edge with some adhesive substance.

Consequently it was only about a quarter of an inch in diameter, and all know a much larger article than that could be easily concealed in the mouth.

Very fortunately it happened that neither of these manoeuvres were observed, and when he was searched they never dreamed of looking into his mouth.

The case would have been rather different had they known actually as a fact that something had been given, but they had only a strong suspicion of it.

However, nothing was found.

Mr. Tapner was far from being satisfied, and yet he was immensely pleased to think he had secured one if not two of the highwayman's accomplices.

The day passed slowly away. Tom had removed the paper from his mouth, for he was fearful that the moisture would injure it.

There is no knowing what he might not have been tempted to give for the chance of reading this letter from his friend, for that it was from Dick he felt assured.

At last the men who were on guard over him were replaced by two more, and shortly after that Tom found an opportunity of perusing the epistle.

It ran thus:—

"DEAR TOM,—I have some news to tell you that will astonish you not a little. Your old friends C. D. and 16 S. J. have come back to England. They are with me now while I write this. We have learned that your cell has been changed, so I suppose you have lost the files. Never mind, perhaps it is all for the best. We have decided to let you go to trial. We will engage a first-rate counsel, who will, I dare say, be able to get you off. If so, you will

find us all there at the door of the court. If you lose the day, don't despair; we shall get you out of the old jug, so make your mind quite easy. We should try it on before you took your trial, but there is not time. Besides, C. and J. think it best to give you the chance of getting off acquitted, because, if so, we shall be spared the risk and danger of getting you out; not that we mind it, only C. says it is courage sometimes to avoid danger. Between the three of us we are sure to carry the affair out successfully. I don't know whether you will be able to send us any message back. If not, we understand that you quite agree with what we are doing for you. Your sincere friend,
"DICK."

Tom read this letter over two or three times, and then gave himself up to reflection.

He was indeed surprised to learn that his two old friends had returned, and still more that they had fallen in with Dick.

However, the circumstance of all three having determined to get him off, made him much more at ease in his mind; so, after having perused the letter for the last time, he tore it up into small fragments, and dropped them upon the floor of the cell.

Of course, he made no attempt to escape, so Mr. Tapner expended all his wonderful cleverness unnecessarily.

Tom came to the conclusion that it would be best to take his trial. His chance of acquittal was, however, small. Still his chance could not be made worse than it just then was.

He knew, too, the fearful peril his friends would incur in doing anything to forward his escape, and he was not selfish enough to wish them to run into danger on his account unnecessarily.

On the following morning Tom Davis and Ellen were placed at the bar in Bow-street, and charged with being accomplices of Tom King, then a prisoner in Newgate.

Mr. Tapner stated the case against them, and dwelt upon it in every conceivable way.

Then the men were called who swore to his identity.

But there was not sufficient evidence to support the charge; in fact it rested upon suspicion merely.

The magistrate, however, when he dismissed the case, thought fit to administer a rather severe caution, coupled with a threat of what he should do if he was again brought before him under similar circumstances.

To the mortification of Mr. Tapner, Mr. Davis and Ellen left the dock in triumph.

Their first act was to make all speed towards the "Hand and Keys," at which place they arrived in the early part of the afternoon.

Right glad was Mrs. Davis and the three highwaymen to see them return in safety. They had been in a state of great alarm.

Tom Davis at once gave an account of all that had taken place.

As soon as he finished, the three highwaymen called for their steeds, and were for riding off to London, but Davis advised them to remain till after dark.

To this prudent advice they were wise enough to listen, and at a little after eight they mounted and rode off to London.

"Don't let me see you again," said Davis, "until you bring Tom back; and it strikes me, after what has happened to-day, this will be anything but a safe place for you."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

DICK TURPIN POINTS OUT TO CLAUDE AND JACK JONATHAN WILD'S GIBBET ON CLAPTON COMMON.

THIS was right enough; indeed it is greatly to be wondered at that officers were not immediately sent off to search the place to see whether any of Tom's friends were hiding there.

But they considered it so improbable a thing that they should run the risk of sheltering themselves in so dangerous a place, that they deemed it unworthy of their notice.

Before, however, we follow the three highwaymen on their journey to London, we will take a glance at two subsidiary characters in our narrative, in whose fate it may be presumed the reader feels a certain degree of interest.

We allude, of course, to that gallant and frank-hearted

young sailor, Lieutenant Thrustans, and his betrothed, who had been so cruelly persecuted by her treacherous guardian.

We wish to take the present opportunity of following their fortunes and disposing of them finally, in order that we may not have to interrupt the succession of the strange events which so immediately followed, events which, in the intensity of their interest, will be found superior to any of those which have preceded them.

But it is not our wish to keep the reader back from the perusal of the strange adventures which occurred immediately after the three friends left the public-house, so we will put in a few words as possible that which we have to say.

In brief, then, to the great joy of Rupert, after careful medical attendance, Katharine recovered her health, and what was of even more importance still, her reason.

The two rascally doctors were taken into custody, and Lowne House establishment broken up. They were weary to confess, in the hope that by so doing they would receive more lenient punishment, and what they said was quite sufficient to make the villa of Stephen Murray apparent.

The lieutenant then made his deposition upon oath of all that had taken place between himself and the guardian, omitting, by their particular request, all mention of the two highwaymen who had befriended him.

Among the papers belonging to Stephen Murray was found a document purporting to be a deed of gift of the whole of the estates from Katharine to him.

But this was declared a forgery, and the young heiress put into possession of her rights.

It will require no great amount of prescience to see that one of the first things she did was to bestow her hand upon Rupert Thrustans, whom she had loved so well before, but whose conduct had thoroughly endeared him to her heart.

At her request he gave up the nautical profession, although he was on the high road to advancement, and settled down to the quiet, happy life of an English gentleman.

In after years, when he had assembled about him a few warm-hearted friends, it was his delight to relate his strange adventures with the notorious highwaymen, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

As for Koolah, the tiger-wolf, he became more domesticated every day he lived, and suffered himself to be made the playmate of his master's children.

Having, then, brought things in connection with the young couple to so satisfactory a termination, we will follow our three friends.

They proceeded at a very easy pace.

"Sometime ago," said Claude, "a very clever lawyer lived at No. 8, in the Old-square, Lincoln's-inn. I don't know whether you have heard of him, but in my opinion, the best thing we can do is to put the case entirely into his hands."

"What is his name?" asked Dick.

"Well, that," Claude replied, with a laugh, "is more than I can tell you, but he calls himself Mr. Theophilus Lazenby."

"I have never heard of him," said Jack.

"Nor I," said Turpin.

"So much the better. He keeps his things very snug, I can tell you; but he is a clever rascal."

"And you think he will suit us?"

"Oh! yes. He will carry the affair through from beginning to end. I mean he will find the counsel, witnesses, and all that, but you must understand he never appears in the affair himself."

"How is that?"

"He can carry on his trade with all the more safety; but there is one thing I expect he will require—rather a heavy fee."

"The deuce! How much?"

"I can't say exactly."

"But what should you estimate?"

"Five hundred pounds!"

"Five hundred pounds?"

"Yes; and you may think yourself lucky if you get in for that."

"Then we must get some money from somewhere."

"I suppose so. How much have you got?"

"Something less than seventy pounds, which I took the other night."



[TOM KING IS BROUGHT TO TRIAL.]

"Then we shall want something like ten times that amount altogether."

"That's a great deal, and very little time to get it in."

"There is not much time, but we must set about it at once. There are three of us, and surely we ought to manage something extraordinary."

"It is so uncertain," said Turpin.

"You're right, it is; now, if you'll believe me, both Jack and myself have had several adventures since we landed, and not one has brought us any money."

"Except coppers," said Jack.

"Oh! d—n the coppers," cried Claude, who, whenever the adventure with the parsons was mentioned, always got into a rage, "d—n 'he coppers."

Jack laughed as he said—

"With all my heart; but not only have we had nothing but bad luck ever since we landed, but the rascally captain jumped overboard with our portmanteau, which contained more than the sum we require."

"How vexatious,"

"It is to be hoped, though, that we shall have a run of better luck."

"The best plan will be," said Turpin, "to stop everybody we meet, and not leave off until we have got the sum we want."

"That will be our best plan. We have got the best part of the night before us, and it will do if we see the lawyer in the morning."

"Poor Tom," said Claude, "he must be miserable enough where he is, but anyhow it won't be for long."

"If," said Jack, "we can only get him acquitted, all will be well. We will form ourselves into a band of four, and do something to make ourselves remembered."

"Just so—but steady, there is the turnpike yonder."

"All right."

"I propose," said Turpin, "that we take the turn to the left as soon as we get through the pike; that will take us out on to the Great North-road, by Clapton Common."

"It will be best, you think?"

"I do. On the high-road, we cannot fail to meet with a good booty. Trot gently through the pike."

The toll-man, hearing the travellers approach, hastened to open the gate and Dick threw him half-a-crown for his pains.

They were not long traversing the bit of cross-country road, especially as they gave their horses the rein, and they soon emerged upon the spot Turpin had mentioned—at that time rather a wild bit of country, and quite away from London.

Clapton Common, of which a vestige still remains, was then on both sides of the road—the high-road, in fact, intersecting it.

The moon now broke forth.

"Look," said Dick, as he raised his right arm and pointed out some object in the distance, "on yonder gibbet hang the remains of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, who was put there just fourteen years ago."

"I know it well," cried Claude Duval; "but I should think there is not much left of him now."

"Very little indeed," said Dick Turpin; "only the thing is pointed out as a curiosity, that's all."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN EASE THE TAX-GATHERER OF HIS BURDEN.

By common consent all three puffed up before the gibbet and its ghastly burden.

There was sufficient moonlight for them to distinguish its outlines.

Thirteen years and a few months had elapsed since the gibbet was erected on that lonsome piece of ground.

During that time, the stout oak timber of which it was composed had bravely withstood the attacks of both wind and weather, though it was decidedly all the worse for its struggles against the power of time.

It had sunk some two feet into the soil, and had lost that perpendicular position it once had.

From the cross-beam of the gibbet hung the dark mass said to be the mortal remains of Jonathan Wild, though at the present time, without some such assertion, they would never have been taken as such.

How it was the body held together as it did seemed a mystery, until, upon a close examination, it was seen that the suspending irons formed a kind of cage in which it was contained.

As it swung gently to and fro in the night air, the rusty fastenings made a horrible creaking noise.

"And so that is all that remains of Jonathan Wild," said Sixteen-String Jack, after he and his companions had contemplated it some moments in silence. "It is an awful fate!"

He shuddered as he spoke.

"But surely," said Claude Duval, "if ever any one merited such a doom he did. He was a villain—a deeply-dyed villain, delighting in cruelty for cruelty's sake; a sworn foe to right and innocence; the willing accomplice in all kinds of villainy and guilt; a man dead to all generous emotions; ruthless, vindictive, and a very demon in his revenge!"

"He little thought," replied Turpin, "when bringing so many to the scaffold as he did, that such would be his own fate; but there is retribution, even in this world."

"Come on," said Claude Duval. "I have seen enough of him. For my part I can only say, he deserves all he has got for his conduct to Jack Sheppard and Blueskin alone."

"I never heard the particulars of that affair. You see, I was but a child when it happened."

"I suppose not. Some day I will tell you, but there is no time now, for I can hear the sound of wheels along the road. Hark!"

"Yes," said Turpin. "Some one is coming, sure enough, though they are at a good distance yet."

* In the speaking of Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, Claude Duval was no more than just; but for a full and faithful account of the life of this unparalleled miscreant, the reader is referred to a work entitled "Blueskin," now publishing in penny numbers, uniform with "Black Bess," and by the same author. The details there given are from authentic sources, and may be relied upon as correct. Nos. 1 and 2, in a wrapper, price one penny.

"Yonder are some trees," cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us back our horses into the shadow of them."

This was done instantly, and then, silent and motionless as statues, they awaited the coming of their prey.

Every moment now brought the sounds more plainly to their ears.

"It is a light vehicle," said Jack, "and drawn by one horse—a dog-trap, I take it."

"It is coming from London!"

"Oh! yes, and will be in sight directly; are you all ready?"

"Quite."

"Then as soon as he gets opposite here we will all three dart out upon him."

"Good! I only hope he carries a good booty to make it worth our trouble."

"Silence, now, all of you! voices travel a long way on the night air. It is never policy to put one on his guard! Silence!"

Not another word was spoken.

The peculiar grating noise of the wheels upon the road grew louder and louder.

Whoever it was, he was coming along at a pretty good speed.

The road was quite straight for some distance, so the three highwaymen, as they looked down it in the direction of London caught sight of the approaching vehicle.

Five minutes afterwards it was on a level with them.

"Surrender!" cried all three of the highwaymen, with one voice, springing out upon the unfortunate and startled traveller. "Pull up, or we fire, and it is scarcely possible for all three of us to miss you."

"Mercy—gentlemen—mercy!" said the traveller, who they saw was a fat man, with a rather bulldog-looking countenance. "Spare my money, gentlemen; but, oh! take my life! No—no, I didn't mean that. Take my life, and—no—I mean"—

"Silence!" said Dick. "Another word, and it is your last! I always keep my word. I am Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

"And I am Claude Duval!"

The traveller turned a horrified glance at the speaker, as he heard him pronounce the well-known and much-dreaded name.

"And I am Jack Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

The fat man slipped down off the seat of the gig in an agony of fear, and made a ludicrous attempt to hide himself under the thick woollen mat at the bottom of it.

"Your money!" cried Dick. "Your money, and be quick about it! Hand it over, and your miserable life will be spared."

As Turpin spoke, he made a snatch at the mat, and threw it into the road.

Some dismal groans now came from the traveller's lips. He did not dare to speak after the threats that had been held out to him.

It was quite evident they would have it what they wanted, for he was quite incapable of giving it to them.

Claude performed that part of the business, but though he searched him thoroughly from head to foot, yet all he could find was about a pound in silver, and a monster pinchbeck watch.

He was about to turn away disappointed, when happening to touch one of the cushions on the seat, it moved, and disclosed beneath it a large leather bag, carefully tied round with a thong of the same material.

To snatch at it, and feel its contents, was the work of a moment.

"Money," he cried, "by all that's good!"

The traveller looked up, and when he saw the bag in Claude's hands, the groan he was about to utter changed into a shriek.

"No, no," he cried, "mercy, mercy. If you take it I am ruined. Surely you will not ruin me good sir. The money in that bag does not belong to me, but I am responsible for it. Mercy, mercy! Do not take it. Oh! do not."

Dick put the muzzle of his pistol to his ear.

"Be silent," he said, "before you are compelled by bullet."

"But it is the king's money. Five hundred pounds a gold! All taxes that I have collected. Me v. mer-

You understand now that I shall be a ruined man if you are that."

"What!" shouted Claude, "are you a tax-gatherer?"

"Ye-es, good sir, I—I am, if you please," was the stammered reply, for Duval's manner was rather alarming.

"Then you will get small mercy from us," he said, as he slipped the bag, which he had been told contained so large an amount, into his pocket. "To almost any one else we would have listened, but not to you. Shoot him through the head, Dick, if he says another word; and you, Jack, bear a hand here. We'll tie the varmint to a tree. Come on."

Somewhat or other our friends shared in that general dislike which is felt for tax-collectors. Very few, indeed, like them. We knew one once who actually set up in business, but of course it turned out a bad speculation.

More dead than alive, this fat man (who looked as though he throve on the blood of others) was lifted out of his gig, and by means of the reins lashed firmly to one of the trees on the wayside.

Had the unfortunate wretch ever so wished it, he could not have found breath enough to cry for help, but he could not control his groans.

A sharp cut with the whip was now given to the horse, and away it started at a most alarming rate.

As for our three friends, they put spurs to their steeds, and did not venture to draw rein until they were some distance from the spot where they had committed this most daring robbery.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK PROPOSES A STRANGE CURE FOR JEALOUSY.

"I THINK," said Dick, some few minutes afterwards, changing his mare's speed from a gallop to an easy canter, "I think, Claude, if the tax-gatherer told us the truth concerning the contents of the bag, we shall have money enough for our purpose."

"Pretty nearly," said Claude. "I will just take the liberty though of convincing myself that all is well, not, however, that I am much in doubt about the matter."

Duval cut the pieces of leather that was used to tie up the mouth of the bag, and looked into it.

"All right," he said, as he drew forth several guineas. "He has not deceived us. His fright was too genuine for that, and from the size and weight of the bag I am inclined to think he has told us the truth about the amount also."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick; "this, then, is luck indeed. Surely, with what I already have, we possess sufficient for our purpose."

"It may be, and yet none too much," said Jack; "let us stick to our original intent."

"Agreed."

"It will never do for us to run short of funds, and jeopardize the affair in that way."

"So I think," said Claude; "this is certainly an extraordinary slice of luck, but still it's time we had one, I rather think, and"—

Duval broke off suddenly, for a fearful shriek came from somewhere close to the spot upon which they now stood.

"Good heavens!" cried Turpin, "what a fearful scream—there it is again, and again! Come or there is a female somewhere in distress."

A succession of shrieks, that were really awful from their intensity, continued uninterruptedly.

"This way," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack; "this is the way! Over the fence to that house yonder! Quick! quick!"

Before he had well finished speaking they had all leapt over a low fence that was on the right-hand side of the road.

It surrounded a small garden in which was a pretty little cottage.

It was evidently from this habitation that the screams issued.

Dismounting from their steeds, and leaving them loose, the three friends dashed open the door of the cottage and entered.

The scene that met their gaze was one of the utmost

The various articles of furniture the room contained were strewn about in the greatest confusion.

Those that were at all breakable lay in fragments. Near the fire-place, shrinking down to the floor as close as she could, and endeavouring to crawl along it, was a woman.

Over her stood a man with rather a formidable black-thorn stick in his hand, with which he belaboured her incessantly, notwithstanding her shrieks and frantic cries for mercy.

So intent, too, was he upon what he was about that he did not notice the intrusion of the three highwaymen, until Dick Turpin sprang forward and caught him from behind, round the middle, taking away the use of his arms entirely.

Sixteen-String Jack wrenched the stick from his grasp.

Claude Duval assisted the victim of his brutality to rise, and would have placed her in a chair had there been a whole one in the place.

As it was, he was very glad to find her able to keep her feet, because it showed the injuries she had received were not so severe as he expected.

This done, they looked about them for an explanation.

The man who had been using the stick so dastardly struggled and fought to free himself from Turpin's grasp, but he might just as well have tried to have got out of the hug of a grizzly bear.

Jack pulled out a pistol, and cocking it, held it in his face, at the same moment admonishing him in a significant tone of voice to be quiet.

As might be expected, the man was an arrant coward—for no one but a coward would think of striking a woman—ceased his struggles instantly, and when his own life was in danger became submission itself.

"Speak!" said Claude to the woman, assuming as kind and as assuring a tone of voice as he could. "Speak! tell us the meaning of all this."

"Do not harm him, gentlemen. Pray do not."

"Can it be possible you ask for mercy for him who has treated you so unmanly?"

"Yes—yes! Oh! yes! He is my husband!"

"Then is his conduct the more inexcusable. What is his motive for thus ill-using you?"

The woman was silent, but Claude was by no means displeased with her for that.

He turned threateningly towards her husband.

"What is your motive for thus abusing your wife. Tell me, or so sure as I am a living man, I'll make you."

The man was silent.

Claude made a couple of paces towards him, but the woman, springing forward, held him back.

"Spare him, sir. Spare him!"

"Tell me his motive, then?"

"He—he—is"—

"What?"

"Jealous!"

"Yes," exclaimed the man, now the secret was out, "and cause enough she gives me. I should like to know who wouldn't be jealous!"

"That is no excuse for ill-using her," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Not a bit," said Claude. Then, turning to the wife, he asked,—

"Have you ever given him just grounds for jealousy?"

"Never, sir, as I hope I have a soul to be saved."

"That is sufficient."

"Is false!" cried the man. "I saw her talking and laughing with the milkman this afternoon."

"And what of that?"

"What of that? Do you think I want to see a couple of horns growing out of my head?"

"No, but you deserve them. And let me tell you you are going the right way to get them. As for your suspicions, I believe them to be groundless, especially if they have no better grounds than the instance you brought forward. And now, is it for that you were base-hearted enough to strike her?"

"What's that to you, I should like to know?" asked the man, plucking up a spirit. "If it was, what is it to you? She's my wife, isn't she? and can't a man do as he likes with his own?"

"You will quickly find out what it is to do with us. You are a miserable hound, unworthy of the name of man."

and it is a thousand pities that any woman should be cursed with such a brute for a husband. Down on your knees this instant, and ask her pardon, and promise to be no longer jealous, if you wish to preserve your wretched life."

"Never!"

"Kneel!" thundered Jack, and he thrust the muzzle of the pistol into his ear. "Kneel, or you are a dead man!"

The wife would have rushed forward and interposed, but not Claude held her back.

The man fell upon his knees.

"Dare not to move! and now I will try if you cannot be made sensible of what retribution is. Dick," he added, turning to his comrade, "shoot him through the head if he attempts to move."

"Spare him, gentlemen, do spare him!" entreated the woman. "He is my husband, and I love him, although he does ill-treat me! Spare him! spare him!"

"Do you hear that, you wretch?" cried Claude. "If you have got any shame in you that ought to bring it out."

"Here," cried Jack Rann, addressing the wife, as stooping down he picked up the stick; "take hold of that, and if you value your husband's life do as I bid you."

Thus adjured, the poor woman took hold of the stick.

"Now," he continued, "stand there, and if he does not instantly beg your pardon, and promise better behaviour for the future, lay it about him, even as he did about you."

"No—no—no," cried the woman, full of terror at the very idea.

"If you wish to save his life you will. Stand there! It is his own fault if he suffers you to strike him, though he richly deserves it. Still, he has a chance if he chooses to beg your pardon."

"Oh! William," sobbed the poor woman, "you hear what they say. Do as they wish you, pray do, and do not force me to obey them."

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN MAKE ANOTHER PRIZE ON THEIR WAY TO TOWN.

Now this man, who, by the way, most certainly deserved the soundest thrashing that could be given him—this man we say, if he had been possessed of only a small quantity of that very valuable commodity, common-sense, would assuredly have then and there ended the matter by asking pardon of his wife, and promising amendment for the future.

But no, there was too much pig-headed obstinacy in his disposition to permit him to do this.

So he made no answer to his wife's appeal, but fixed his eyes doggedly upon the ground.

"He will have it," said Jack. "Now, ma'am, don't be afraid to hit him. Come down with the whole strength of your arm. Don't be afraid. If he ventures to move, I will blow his brains out. Now then, begin."

Now this woman, who was so unlucky as to have a jealous husband and a brute besides, by her own confession, loved him; so, of course, at first she had shrunk from the idea of inflicting pain upon him, although he had not scrupled to use her so badly.

But when she saw that he would not avoid the punishment, as he easily might have done, she began to see the justice of what she was about to do.

Still she resolved to give him one more trial: but alas! he remained as sullen as before.

"Since you are determined to have it, then, you shall," she cried, and as she spoke she brought the stick down upon her recreant husband's back with such lusty and rapid strokes, that he howled fearfully with the pain.

"Bravo!" cried Jack, "keep it up till he asks your pardon. I'll take care he don't move, or do you a mischief. Pay into him."

Thus encouraged, the woman, whose fury was now thoroughly aroused, continued her beating with right good will, though her arm ached so badly she could hardly lift it up.

"Thack! thwack! thwack!" went the blows, till the husband could bear it no longer, and he dropped flat upon the floor, and implored her forgiveness in the most abject terms.

Then, by every asseveration he could call to mind, he promised never again to be as absurdly jealous or to ill-treat his wife.

He was assisted to his feet thoroughly cowed; he was quite conquered.

"Forgive me, William," cried the wife, who was now over, and bursting into tears, she flung herself into his arms. "Forgive me; but what else could I do?"

"That's right," cried Turpin. "You ought both of you to be grateful to us to the longest day of your lives. I hope the lesson, as it was a sharp one, will last you your lives. The best thing you can do now is to forgive each other—forget the past—and make a new beginning."

So saying, Dick left the cottage, followed by his comrades, partly assured that the pair were on better terms with each other than they had been for some time past.

They quickly mounted their horses, and, leaping the fence, were once again on the high road.

"There was not much profit in that adventure, at any rate," said Claude; "though I by no means regret the time it has consumed. It is to be hoped that he will behave better in future."

"I don't know whether it will be a permanent cure."

"That will depend chiefly upon the wife," returned Claude; "but I daresay that she, finding her husband was jealous, did all she could to tease him. It's a very common, but very silly practice, and provocative of no end of marriage-life mischief."

"Stop your sermonizing," exclaimed Dick. "Look there!"

In obedience to his words, Claude and Jack looked down the road, and saw a man on horseback.

"What, more game?"

"It looks like it. Let us ride on as though we were ordinary travellers. If upon getting nearer we think he looks likely, we will stop him."

"Agreed."

On drawing nearer they found the man on the horse was a sturdy-looking fellow, wearing a quaker-shaped hat on his head.

The horse he was mounted upon was by no means a handsome one to look at, though he might nevertheless be a good one to go.

"We must try it on with him," said Turpin. "Keep in a line across the road. I shall be nearest, so I will stop him."

They were now silent, for they were close enough for the traveller to overhear what was said.

"Halt!" cried Dick, as soon as he was on a level with him, and levelling a pistol with the rapidity of thought.

"Halt, I say!"

"Oh! Lord," groaned the man; "they're highwaymen."

"We are. Three to one is rather long odds, you know, so just hand over what you have got without any bother. If you do so at once, no violence will be offered you."

"Alack—alack!" replied the man: "this will be but a sorry journey for me. But still I count my life of more value than the money I happen to have about me."

"Spoken like a sensible man," cried Duval. "Just hand it over to me."

In compliance with this request the man, with many sighs, put a heavy purse in Duval's hands.

"That's all, gentlemen, upon my soul it is, except a few shillings to pay my expenses on the road."

"Be off, then; you are welcome to that, and thank your lucky stars that you have got off so easily as you have."

The man did not need to be told this twice, but, striking his heels against his horse's flanks, he set off at a pace that soon took him both out of sight and hearing.

"Capital," said Claude. "We really are in luck's way to-night. Why this purse must contain a hundred and fifty or two hundred guineas at least."

"Bravo! then we shall have enough."

"We won't neglect business, though, to-night's work shall be talked about, and no mistake."

"We are going the right way, but we must be more cautious now; we shall reach the city very shortly."

So many important events call upon us for immediate notice, that we feel we cannot spare the time to relate in detail the other adventures they had that night, especially as none of them were of very peculiar or novel in their character. More travellers were stopped, but from none

of them was taken sufficient booty to recompense them for their time and trouble.

It was rather late and very dark when they turned the corner of the Bank of England into the Poultry, and the streets were quite deserted.

"There will be a devil at a row," remarked Claude, "about the money we have taken from the tax-gatherer, so I think the best thing we can do now is to see the lawyer to-night. He used to sleep in his chambers in Lincoln's-Inn when I knew him, and I daresay he does now."

"I have no objection to such a course," replied Turpin. "We shall have the matter off our minds, and, besides, we can easily make our way to old Matthew's, in Drury-lane, whose crib is, I take it, about the safest refuge we can find in all London."

"You know best about that, Dick."

"Then, if you will be guided by me, that is where you will take up your quarters. If there is any danger old Matthew is sure to get us out of it."

"Take it easy, then, and we shall not rouse suspicion."

CHAPTER CXL.

MR. THEOPHILUS LAZENBY HOLDS OUT BUT FAINT HOPES OF PROCURING TOM KING'S ACQUITTAL.

OUR readers must all be of opinion that it was a very bold thing for our three friends to think of journeying through some of the widest and most populous thoroughfares in the metropolis, but they did it; and likely enough avoided that suspicion which they would have been almost sure to have raised had they taken for their route some of the bye streets.

As it was, no notice was taken of them whatever.

Down Cheapside, across St Martin's-le-Grand, along Newgate-street, past the dark, frowning walls of the old prison, down Skinner-street and Snow-hill, and up Holborn they shaped their way.

At the corner of Chancery-lane they paused to allow a hackney-coach to emerge, and then they trotted down it to the gateway of Lincoln's-Inn.

It was arranged that Claude Duval and Dick Turpin alone should enter, and that Sixteen-String Jack should stay outside to look after the horses.

The intricacies of the old inn were quite familiar to Duval, and he had his companion by the most direct route to No. 8, Old Square.

Late as it was, lights streamed from many of the casements. For one thing the sessions were near at hand, and a good many clerks were employed to rather late hours, in making out briefs for the counsel.

The door of No. 8 was standing open, so the pair entered, and commenced the ascent of the stairs without let or hindrance.

"It is on the fourth floor," said Claude. "Come along."

Several oil lamps were hung at intervals upon the staircase, so they were tolerably well able to see where they were going.

The topmost story was at length gained, and then on a door facing them they saw painted the words,—

MR. THEOPHILUS LAZENBY.

Claude Duval tapped sharply upon the pane, and waited silently.

Then the door was opened by a man who looked for all the world like some musty old parchment deed.

He looked keenly and suspiciously at his visitors.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"It's all right, The," replied Claude.

The old man recognised the voice, though he did not the person of his visitant. If his eyes failed him, his memory and hearing did not.

"Come in, come in," he said. "Why, it's years and years since I saw you! Come in, come in."

The old lawyer led them into an inner room, which was fitted up with tolerable comfort as an office or reception room.

The two highwaymen unfolded their business to him.

"Ah!" he replied, after having heard them to the end without uttering a syllable, "ah!"

"What do you say, Mr. Lazenby?"

"Awkward job!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I have heard something of it from private channels, and"—

"What?"

"Without actually being aware of the specific charge against him, yet I can say from pretty good authority that the case is as clear against him as a case could be, and that conviction is inevitable."

"What would you advise us to do? We are willing to pay well so long as we see a prospect of attaining our desires."

"Let me think, let me think."

A few moments' silence now ensued.

"I suppose there would be no chance of disputing his identity?"

"I fear none; his countenance is well known to many; as well known even as my own."

"That's bad! If it hadn't happened so, we might have got some one to swear he was the wrong man; but now that's all up."

"An alibi?" suggested Turpin.

"My dear sir, the thing is not to be thought of for a moment. The dodge is too stale and old, and in this case would be seen through directly. The only thing I can advise is the employment of some sharp counsel to watch the case, and attempt to overthrow the evidence."

"Let that be done, then. We leave you to choose the man best suited for the purpose."

"There is not much to be hoped for even then, if what I have been told about the case is correct. It is so simple, and yet so complete, that it will be impossible to find a flaw in it."

"Still it must be tried," cried Dick Turpin. "Look! here is a bag containing five hundred guineas, all in gold. Take it, and employ it to the best advantage."

Mr. Lazenby's eyes sparkled with avarice when he saw this large sum.

"All shall be done that can be done," he said, as he clutched it eagerly; "you may depend upon that. The sharpest man in practice shall be there to watch the evidence for the prosecution. But let me tell you further that robberies round about and in the metropolis have increased to such an extent that the legislature have determined to make an example of someone, and that someone is Tom King."

"They shall be cheated," said Turpin, "or I will myself perish in the attempt. My two staunch friends here have promised to aid me to the utmost of their power, and we are certain to succeed."

"I hope you may," said Mr. Lazenby, as he rose, to intimate the conference was over. "On my part, you may depend nothing will be left undone."

With this assurance the two highwaymen took their leave.

They found Jack Ranu rather impatient at having been kept so long.

The result of the interview was communicated to him.

By the time they had finished the narration, they reached White Horse-yard.

Dick gave the peculiar signal, and the little side door was, as usual, opened by old Matthew himself.

He was rather alarmed when he saw three persons, but Dick Turpin soon let him know who they were.

The horses were placed safely in the stable, and then all four adjourned to the little private room behind the bar.

"I'm rather surprised at your venturing here, captain, when the officers are so keen on the scent; but it's just like you—just like you. And now about Tom King."

"Very bad," he said, when Dick finished telling him.

"Very bad! One thing, however, they didn't find the files; but they changed Tom's dungeon, as I suppose you know."

"Yes!"

"It's a sad pity; he might have worked his way to freedom by this time; but there he is, you see, and it appears to me worse off than ever."

"Not worse, that I see," said Duval; "I have faith in the old lawyer. He never buoys anyone up with false hopes, but he is generally successful for all that."

"Well," said Jack, "from what I can hear of the affair, my opinion is that he don't stand the least ghost of a chance of being acquitted, and I am sorry to say that when the authorities once make up their minds to hang a man they nearly always succeed."

"That may be, but I still cling to the belief that I shall bank them."

"You know - should only be too glad for you to succeed, for I would myself go through no small amount of danger to do him a service."

"Well, you had better rest now," said old Matthew, "while you have the chance. I suppose you will be present at the trial?"

"Certainly, all three of us."

"Then the service of my old friend, the costumer, at the corner of Hart-street will be called into requisition, and I'll wager my life he disguises you so well that you may defy detection."

"I believe that," said Turpin, "from what I have already seen of his capabilities in that way. But come, if we are to roost, show us the way at once."

Half-an-hour afterwards all three, notwithstanding their anxiety and danger, were sound asleep, but old Matthew was awake and keeping guard.

CHAPTER CXL.

TOM KING IS FREED FROM HIS FETTERS, AND DULY PUT ON HIS TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILY.

VERY, very wearily did the time pass for Tom King in his gloomy dungeon, but at length Wednesday morning came.

He had learned that "Tom Davis and Ellen had been discharged by the magistrate, but that was all the news of the outer world that reached him.

What his friends were exactly doing for him of course he knew not, but still he felt convinced they were doing the best and all that lay in 'em, and the intelligence that his two old comrades, Claude and Jack, had returned, and were exerting themselves to the utmost in his behalf, was a source of great additional hope and satisfaction.

He passed rather a bad night on Tuesday, and awoke tired and unrefreshed. He, however, rose, and having plentifully sluiced his face with cold water, felt wonderfully better.

He had yet some hours to wait, for the court did not open till ten, and he knew his, although the most important, was not the first case on the list.

He breakfasted, and that served to pass away some of the time.

At eleven o'clock he heard a great bustle outside the cell, and then the door was thrown open.

He sprang to his feet, and saw several persons whose faces he was familiar with.

There was the chaplain and the governor, and Winch, the turnkey, and behind them all was the smith who had riveted his irons on.

"Ha! ha! Tom," cried Mr. Tapner, in what he intended to be a highly facetious manner. "Ha! ha! Tom, not got away yet, you see. Managed to keep you safely so far. Ha! ha!"

"Has my time come," asked Tom; "because if it has, I am ready."

"Yours is the next case, my friend. The one that is on now won't take long. Its only a case of assault. Yours won't take long, I fancy, either. Dear me, its as clear as the sun at noon-day."

"You don't say so!"

"Oh! you'll find it out soon enough, never fear. Judge Sykes will try the case. What do you think of that?" Judge Sykes. Do you remember him, eh? You robbed him of his gold repeater and diamond snuff-box on Ealing-common about twelve months ago. If you've forgotten him, he recollects you. Ha! ha! I can fancy how pleased he will be with the evidence against you, and how impartially he will sum up and leave the case in the hands of the jury. Ha! ha!"

By no outward sign did Tom show that he was in the least moved by what Mr. Tapner said to him, but he did recollect Justice Sykes and the robbery spoken of, and he saw his hopes of an acquittal vanish into thin air.

"We are going to remove those ornaments," continued the governor, alluding to the prisoner's fetters, "and by that time you will be wanted in the court."

At a word from Mr. Tapner, the smith came forward and knocked the rivets out of the fetters, which fell with a clang into the floor of the cell, and then Tom King was free.

Comparatively free.

* To be sure he was as much a prisoner as ever, but still he was free from the irons which had so long galled his limbs, and he felt a sensation of relief and freedom immediately.

Scarcely, however, had he time to stretch his limbs than the tinkle of a bell reached his ears.

"Come on!" cried the governor, "as your turn! Guard the prisoner, and don't keep the people waiting."

Two men preceded Tom along the corridor, and two followed, while two more walked on either side of him, having a firm hold of his hands, and the collar of his coat.

In this way the court was reached, and Tom King suddenly found himself in the presence of what seemed to him at the first glance an innumerable multitude—a boundless sea of human heads and faces.

It was only natural for him to shrink a little when he found so many eager eyes fastened upon him, but this was a feeling that he soon subdued, and he looked about him calmly.

The hum of many voices filled the court, which was crowded with persons all eager to obtain a sight of the celebrated highwayman.

At first Tom had been able to distinguish nothing; all had seemed one perfect mass, but now he was able to note distinctly the different objects around him.

Firstly, and most conspicuously, was the judge, whose countenance he immediately recognised.

That was Judge Sykes.

By his side sat one of his brethren.

His eyes next rested upon the clerk of the arraigns, in his seat immediately below the judges, and from him to the barristers who were seated at the table.

To the right were the boxes appropriated to reporters, witnesses, and privileged spectators.

To his left the jury-box and jurors, and further on the witness-box.

Above and behind him was the gallery, as usual crowded to suffocation.

All these different things he noticed in the space of about three seconds, as he glanced around him, and while the clerk of the arraigns was fumbling with the papers before him.

At length that individual rose with some rather formidable-looking parchments in his hands, attached near the upper left-hand corner with a piece of narrow coloured silk ribbon, and gave a prefatory cough.

"Si—lence!" cried the usher of the court, carefully dividing the syllables of the word by making a long pause between them, and laying particular stress upon the i. "Silence."

All became suddenly profoundly still.

The clerk of the arraigns, then, in a rapid, jangling tone of voice, for which such functionaries are noted, commenced reading the indictment against Tom King.

The document itself, with all its needless and ridiculous circumlocution, was sufficiently difficult to comprehend, but it seemed to be his particular object to make so desirable a thing as understanding it quite out of the question.

He gabbled away until at last he paused quite out of breath.

Very little attention appeared to be paid to it.

The jury conversed in whispers.

The barristers at the table either looked over their briefs, or busied themselves in mending the quill pens.

The judges leaned back in their seats with their eyes closed.

But if all these were indifferent to the reading of the indictment, Tom King was not. He leaned forward over the dock, and listened with the greatest eagerness.

But, alas! the mass of legal jargon in which the simple facts were contained was far above his comprehension, and beyond a sort of consciousness that he was charged with robbing some one of something, he could make out nothing, and that was a piece of information he was already in possession of.

From this it appeared pretty clear that he must wait for the opening speech of the prosecution before he could form any precise idea upon the subject.

The clerk of the arraigns wiped his face and regained his breath.

"Prisoner at the bar, you have heard the indictment against you read, do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

A dead silence followed this question, and then Tom King, in a clear, musical voice, which was heard with distinctness in the remotest corner of the court, said—

"Not guilty!"

The faint buzz, which generally succeeds these words, now rose.

Tom looked eagerly at the different countenances of the spectators.

He had a dim sort of consciousness in his mind that his friends were somewhere present in the crowded court, and a natural instinct made him wish to ascertain their whereabouts.

But he was disappointed.

They were there, however, and his eye had actually rested upon them, but he knew them not, so carefully were they disguised; and though they noticed his inquiring, wandering glance, they felt how very unwise it would be to acknowledge it in any way, since such an act would have had the inevitable result of attracting attention to them, the thing of all things which they had most need to fear.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION STATES THE CASE AGAINST TOM KING, AND THE EVIDENCE OF MR. JOSEPH POWIS IS OF A VERY CONCLUSIVE CHARACTER INDEED.

"SI—LENCE!" said the crier again.

Then the counsel for the prosecution rose, and, glancing around him, adjusted his robes about him.

Everybody was instantly on the alert.

But no one listened with an interest equal to Tom King, if we may except his friends, who were then in court.

Amid, then, a most profound silence, the counsel began his address.

He assumed his favourite attitude—that is, he hooked his left thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat, while in his right hand he held his brief.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury:—

"The prisoner at the bar, I am sorry to say, is already only too well known by you, for although he is young, and his career of villainy as yet has necessarily been but short, yet he has managed to create for himself a most unenviable notoriety throughout the length and breadth of the land.

"As is well known, he has by various artifices, managed for a considerable time to elude the grasp of justice; but a day came—as he well knew it must come—when a termination was put to his depredations, and now he stands before you at the bar to answer the charges which will be brought against him.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I feel it is hardly necessary to state that the penalty which the law of the land awards for such offences as those he has been guilty of is death at the hands of the common executioner; but a repetition of that fact by me at the present moment can only have the effect of heightening the solemnity of these proceedings, as well as reminding you of the painful duty which you will have to perform.

"The prisoner, then, stands at the bar of this court to answer with his life the charges made against him; and although I hope you will not, while so much is at stake, draw a too hasty conclusion, yet, on the other hand, I hope, should he be proved by evidence to be guilty, that you will not shrink, through any false feeling of humanity or sentiment, from performing that duty which you owe to society at large for the protection of lives and property, however painful you may find it to be."

The counsel paused, it is presumed, to give additional importance, to what he said, and then resumed:—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it now becomes my province to state as briefly and clearly as possible the facts that will be brought before you in evidence."

"Firstly, then, it appears that on the twelfth of November last past Mr. Joseph Powis, a respectable tradesman, carrying on business as a maker of hardware goods, and residing at Birmingham, having business in London, did set out from that place in a coach, duly licensed for the conveyance of passengers.

"On reaching the neighbourhood of London, at which place the coach is due at six o'clock in the morning, and being still quite dark, the inmates of the coach were alarmed by the trampling of horses' feet, which was immediately followed by a voice calling to the coachman to halt, and the report of a pistol.

"The driver of the coach, gentlemen of the jury, finding his life in danger, brought the vehicle to a standstill, and was then compelled, under pain of death, to sit motionless upon the box.

"The driver, who will appear before you, and the guard also, will swear that the coach was attacked by two highwaymen, both well armed and mounted on steeds of a superior description, and that while one of the villains plundered those passengers on the roof of the coach, the other, letting down the window, plundered those within it.

"Mr. Joseph Powis, the chief witness in the case, was one of the inside passengers, and is prepared to swear that the prisoner at the bar, presenting a loaded pistol at his head, compelled him to hand over a considerable sum of money, at the same time declaring himself to be Tom King, the highwayman, and apparently glorying in his villainy."

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it will be further shown that, having robbed the passengers of all their valuables, the scoundrels decamped. Upon information of the robbery being given, warrants were made out for their apprehension, and officers of police despatched in pursuit. For a long time they were unsuccessful, and many more deeds of violence were committed, so that at length it was deemed expedient to call in the aid of the military, and eventually the prisoner at the bar was captured by a troop of dragoons at a place not far from Southampton, but his accomplice as yet remains at large, a terror to all those who are necessitated to travel with articles of value about their person.

"From all this, gentlemen of the jury, it will be seen that the case against the prisoner at the bar is fearfully clear, distinct, and complete; and having stated the different events, it will now become my duty to call before you certain witnesses who will depose to the truth of the facts I have laid before you."

The counsel threw his brief upon the table, and sat down.

Tom understood all now.

He saw how impossible it was to say anything in defence of what was alleged against him.

The statement which had been made by the counsel for the prosecution was a perfectly true narration of what had taken place on the occasion of Turpin and King robbing the Warwick mail, as described in the twenty-first chapter of this history.

The two judges whispered to each other.

The "gentlemen of the jury" tried to look sagely at each other, and then shook their heads.

The counsel for the prosecution having arranged his papers, cried—

"The first witness called is Mr. Joseph Powis!"

"Mr. Joseph Powis!" repeated the usher.

In obedience to the summons, the sharp-featured man, who had been rather strangely denominated as a maker of Brummagem buttons, made his way to the witness-box, and was duly sworn.

"Now, Mr. Powis, be good enough to state what took place on the twelfth of last November."

"I received a letter from a house I do business with in London, which made it necessary for me to set out on a journey to that place."

"You were then in Birmingham?"

"I was."

"Well, what next?"

"I took an inside seat in the Warwick mail, and all went well till we reached a village on the outskirts of London."

"When was that?"

"About half-past four on the morning of the fifteenth, or rather the sixteenth of November."

"What took place then?"

"We got to a very dark and lonely bit of road, and then I heard the trampling of horses' feet, and a loud voice crying to the coachman to pull up, on pain of death, and then I heard the report of a pistol."

"What next?"

"Before I had time to recover my surprise the coach

window was let down, and a man appeared at it, and demanded our money, watches, rings, and whatever else of value we possessed. The man was armed with pistols, and declared his attention to shoot those who offered the least resistance."

"Go on."

"To save ourselves from personal violence, the other passengers gave him what they had, and I offered him a guinea, but he swore he would count three, and if then I did not hand over all the money I possessed, he would shoot me dead. So, to save my life, I gave him a bag containing a hundred guineas, and then he rode away."

"Very good," said the counsel; "you have given your evidence in a very satisfactory manner indeed."

"I have forgotten one thing."

"Let us hear it."

"The man who robbed us said, 'I daresay you know my name—it's Tom King,' or words to that effect."

"Exactly—and I presume you had a good look at the highwayman's face?"

"I did, sir."

"Then look round the court, and tell me whether you can see the man."

"That's him, sir, standing at the dock. I should know him from a thousand, and I'm ready to swear to him at any minute."

CHAPTER CXLIII.

JUDGE SYKES PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH ON TOM KING.

THE evidence which had just been given by Mr. Joseph Powis, and, above all, his unhesitating willingness to swear to the identity of the prisoner was so conclusive that all in court looked upon the case as settled.

The tale he told was too straightforward and circumstantial to allow of a flaw being found in it, and the counsel that Lawyer Lazenby had employed, who was an uncommonly sharp fellow, threw down his pen, and leaned back in his chair without a word to say on behalf of the prisoner.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury," said the counsel for the prosecution, "will it now be necessary to call the other witnesses I have spoken of, or do you feel yourself satisfied with the testimony given by Mr. Joseph Powis?"

"Who appears on behalf of the prisoner?" asked the judge.

"I do, my lord."

It was the sharp practitioner who spoke.

Tom looked at him and shook his head, as much as to say it was no good his saying anything.

"Then," said the judge, "have you any questions to ask of this last witness?"

"I have, my lord."

"Very well," replied the judge, and he leaned back in his chair in a manner which showed how little interest he felt in what was going to be said, or how much importance he attached to it.

"Now, Mr. Powis, the night, or rather the morning, in question was rather a dark one, was it not?"

"It was."

"I thought so. I understood you to say such was the case, and, further, that the coach at the time it was stopped had just reached a very dark part of the road."

"That is quite correct, sir."

"Then let me advise you to be careful. If it was a dark night, and the coach was in a dark part of the road, how in the world could you see the face of the man who robbed you well enough to swear to his identity?"

Mr. Powis was silent.

"Mind, you're on your oath," said Tom's counsel; "think before you speak. Are you quite sure that it was the prisoner at the bar who committed the robbery upon you?"

"Yes, I am."

"You saw his face, then?"

"Yes, sir, I did, quite plainly."

"But how?"

"The lamp that was burning in the roof enabled me to do so."

"The lamp?"

"Yes; and not only that: he said his name was Tom King, and that is the name of the man at the bar."

"Yes, yes, that is all very fine, but it is not evidence. Are you still prepared to swear to the identity of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am, sir; I saw him quite plain, and I heard him speak, and I am prepared to swear to his voice as well."

"Really," said the judge, opening his eyes and leaning forward, "really, it appears to me our learned friend is merely trifling with the time of the court. The evidence of this man Powis is, in my opinion, quite clear, complete, and unshaken."

"Then, of course, my lord," said Tom's counsel, sitting down, "it is no use for me to speak any further, and I bow to your decision."

"Have you any witnesses for the defence?"

"None, my lord."

"Then I opine the case is ended. There can be no need to call further witnesses for the prosecution, and I shall at once proceed to sum up, and leave the case in the hands of the jury."

There was a momentary pause, during which the judge pretended to read over his notes.

"Silence!" cried the ushers.

Then the judge, in a mumbling tone of voice, commenced summing up.

"Gentlemen of the jury,—

"The case now about to be laid before you for your consideration is so clear and perfect, that it will be no trouble for you to come to a decision.

"The prisoner at the bar, who appears to be allowed on all sides to be Thomas King, the highwayman, has, upon the evidence of a highly respectable tradesman, been shown to have committed a daring robbery.

"In the most positive manner he swears he was in the Warwick coach, that Tom King, the highwayman, rode up the coach-door, robbed the passengers, and took from him a bag containing a large sum in gold.

"To corroborate this, there are the coachman and the guard of the coach.

"I leave the case, gentlemen, in your hands. So straightforward a one has never before been brought before me, and it is impossible for you to come to any other conclusion than that the prisoner at the bar is guilty of the offence with which he is charged, as also of many more of a similar character."

The judge concluded his brief summing up with these words.

It must be confessed he put the case rather strong before the jury, but then, think of the circumstances of the case.

Besides which, a hundred years ago justice was much more loosely administered than it is now.

Of course the jury went through the form of consulting together upon the verdict, and then the foreman turned round, and they took their seats.

An intense silence now prevailed in the crowded court.

The clerk of the arraigns rose and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of the charge brought against him?"

The foreman replied, in a clear voice—

"Guilty!"

A murmur arose from the crowd. The result was just what they expected.

Tom King assumed as much firmness of demeanour as he could under the circumstances, and looked the judge firmly in the face.

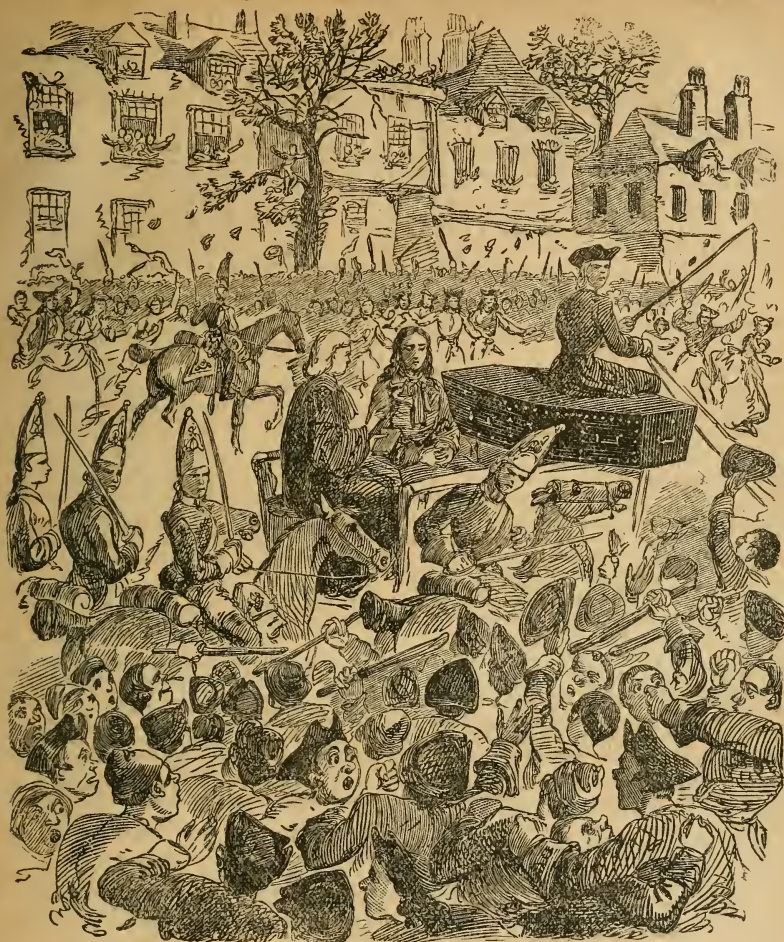
The clerk of the arraigns spoke—

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?"

The judge stooped and produced the black cap, which he carefully adjusted upon his head, and then, addressing Tom King, he spoke in the following manner:—

"Prisoner at the bar, you have this day been found guilty by a jury of your countrymen for an offence which you undoubtedly committed. It is to be deplored that there are others like yourself engaged in making war upon society, but I trust they will take warning by your fate, or they will assuredly meet with the same termination to their careers.

"The crime of robbery in the highway, as lately increased to an alarming and insufferable extent, inasmuch that it is now unsafe and dangerous for any one to go abroad alone."



[TOM KING ON HIS WAY TO TYBURN.]

"Now, this is a state of things which cannot be permitted to continue. The most effective steps will be taken therefore to suppress it, and in all cases where the charge is fully proved, and the prisoner found guilty, the full penalty of the law will be rigorously enforced.

"Prisoner at the bar, you, in common with every other person now present in this court, must be aware that the penalty due to such crimes as you have committed is death.

"You cannot have the plea that you were in ignorance of the consequences which would ensue upon your capture. What you did you must have done with the certainty of at one time suffering an ignominious death staring you in the face.

"But, in defiance of this, you still persevered in the evil course you had commenced. It may indeed be said that you, as an individual, made war against society as a body. There could be but one termination of such a struggle, and that would result in your defeat."

The judge paused a second or so, and then continued—

"However much sympathy and commiseration may be felt by those who are now present for your unhappy position and awful impending death, yet there is another whose feelings must be almost, if not quite, as painful as your own.

"I allude, of course, to myself. Sitting here as I do in the capacity of judge and representative of the laws of the land, it is my duty to pass sentence of death upon you. In some cases this dreadful duty is somewhat lightened by the thought that some reprieve or pardon might be obtained, but in the present instance I have no such consolation. Your deeds of violence have been too many and too great for there to be a probability that any mitigation of your sentence will take place.

"Therefore I must adjure you to cast as much as possible all thoughts of this world from your mind, and prepare for the one you are about so soon to enter. I shall summon what courage I can to pass the dread sentence of death upon you; do you in like manner strive your utmost to receive it with composure, for it is my duty to assure

you that there is not the slightest room for you to hope for any mercy.

"Prisoner at the bar, the sentence of this court, then, upon you is, that you be taken from hence to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, which is appointed to be Tyburn; that you be there hanged until you be dead, and your body afterwards taken down and hung in chains as a terror to all evildoers and a warning to those who may think of embracing your mode of life. Let me most earnestly and solemnly entreat you to spend the short space of time which is allotted you to live in listening to prayers and religious conversations of the ordinary appointed to the prison, that you may look for that mercy from your Creator which you cannot hope to receive from your fellow-men; therefore, may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

CHAPTER CXLIV.

MR. SHERIFF BLANDY AND THE GOVERNOR SETTLE OFF OLD SCORES.

PERFECT silence prevailed for at least a minute after the judge had finished uttering those awful words, which doomed an erring fellow-creature like himself to death.

All eyes were bent upon the prisoner.

Notwithstanding the hopes he had of escape, and the confidence he felt in the power and will of his companions to save him, yet it was not possible for him to be otherwise than deeply moved at his present situation.

Only a portion of the judge's words reached his understanding. The remainder was one uncertain hum, though he was all the time conscious of its import.

And during this period there rushed upon his mind all the more important occurrences of his past life. Above all, stood out the faithlessness of the girl he had loved so well, and to whom his present situation might be fairly enough attributed, for had she remained constant to him he would have been an ornament to society, for which he possessed every necessary qualification.

The last words of the judge's speech, and which to him seemed naught but a hideous mockery, aroused him from the state of abstraction into which he had fallen.

Then, when the last syllable was fairly articulated, he looked anxiously into the faces of the different spectators, in a vain attempt to find whether his friends were actually there present, and to judge by the expression of their countenances what effect the termination of the trial had upon them.

But as on the former occasion, although his gaze more than once rested upon them, yet he knew them not, owing to the care with which they had been disguised.

A jailer now tapped him upon the shoulder, and, turning round at the touch, he saw they were waiting to remove him from the bar.

Seeing this, he looked no more at the countenances of the spectators, looked no longer upon the stern features of the judge, but at once turned round and accompanied them.

Despite his efforts to compose himself, he was much dejected. It was indeed scarcely possible for a human being to pass through such an ordeal as he had, without feeling some emotion.

Indeed, had he have appeared callous, we should have ceased to retain the good opinion we have of him, for, although he sinned and set himself up in opposition to the laws, yet it was only under great provocation.

The short passage which led from the dock was very quickly traversed, and then Tom found himself in a small apartment, face to face with his old enemy, the governor, whose animal-looking face beamed with a diabolical satisfaction.

"Ha! ha. You'll alter your tune now, I'll be bound. I told you how it would be. We've made up our minds to hang you, and we'll do it. Try as you will, you cannot avert your doom. It won't be long, too, before your villainous companion shares your fate, and then the gallows will have had its cue."

"You reckon upon cheating it, then, do you?" said Tom, quietly.

"Don't insult me, you scoundrel," cried the governor, with passion, for, just as Tom finished his dry remark, it followed by a laugh, and, turning "the direc-

tion whence it came, he saw Mr. Blandy slide into the room.

"What do you mean, sir?" roared the governor. "What do you mean?"

"Mean by what?" asked the sheriff, with a coolness that provoked the governor to the last degree.

"Your conduct, sir!"

"My conduct?"

"Yes. I should like to know what you mean by encouraging the prisoners to set my authority at defiance, and insult me to my face. I ask you again, what do you mean by it?"

"My dear sir, pray don't be so violent, but just answer me a question. Why did you speak so unbecomingly to a man in the situation of the prisoner here? Did it look as if you had one spark of manliness in you? None but a craven-hearted man would have behaved thus to a defenceless man. It shows a mean, malicious spirit, and you richly deserve what you have got, and a great deal more beside!"

"Quit this room, sir!" shrieked the governor, whose rage now got completely master of him. "Quit this room, or I'll have you turned out of it! Quit the room, I say!"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said the sheriff; "and if you will condescend to take a word of advice from me, you will be very cautious as to what you are about!"

"You be d—d, and your caution too!" replied the governor, clenching his fists, and walking in a bullying manner up to him. "Will you leave the room?"

"Most certainly not!" said the sheriff, thrusting the governor from him, for he had thrust his face into his. "I have an equal right here with yourself!"

"What do you mean by striking me, sir?" said the governor. "Perhaps you think you have a right to do that, but I'm d—d if I don't convince you to the contrary! Take that!—and that!"

As he spoke these words, the governor gave the sheriff a couple of heavy blows in the face, which made that gentleman stagger back a few paces.

Nevertheless, he maintained his composure, and said, calmly—

"I call upon all here to witness that I was struck first, and now, Mr. Tanner, we'll settle off our old scores!"

At these words, then, he made a rush at the governor, and laid about him with right good will.

Tom King, in spite of his dejection, enjoyed this scene mightily, and he was delighted beyond measure to find that the good-natured sheriff was considerably more than a match for the rascally governor.

As for the turnkeys who were present, their gratification was unbounded, though they concealed it as much as they could.

Nor could they very well interfere, for their duty was to keep firm hold of their prisoner.

The sheriff danced round and round in a manner that not only exhibited uncommon agility, but also quite baffled Mr. Tapper, who, blinded by rage and the blows he had received, knew not where to expect his adversary's attack, and as for returning his blows, that was quite out of the question.

The contest was not of very long duration, and just as Mr. Blandy gave the governor the blow which decided the battle, the door was opened, and the Lord Mayor, followed by several of the other city dignitaries (?) entered.

They looked at each other, speechless and aghast, at the extraordinary scene before them.

Mr. Blandy wiped his face with his handkerchief.

He had sustained but little injury from his opponent, who was stretched at full length upon the floor.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked the Lord Mayor. All were silent.

"Will no one answer me?" asked the mayor.

"Will you permit me to speak, sir?" said Tom King quietly.

"Who are you?"

"Never mind. A prisoner, if you like, but a witness as to what has just taken place."

"And can you explain it?"

"I can."

"Do so, then."

"Mr. Tapper, the governor, insulted Mr. Blandy to such a degree that it was impossible not to resent it. He did, however, control himself, and then the governor

without further provocation, struck him two heavy blows in the face. Staggering back, but still maintaining his composure, Mr. Blandy called upon us to bear witness that he had been struck first, and then gave Mr. Tapner a sound thrashing, as he deserved."

"It's a lot of ~~4-4~~ lies!" yelled the governor, struggling to a sitting posture; "it's a lot of ~~4-4~~ lies, I tell you!"

"Mr. Governor," said the Lord Mayor, sternly, "be careful, or I shall have to fine you five shillings for swearing."

"D-n you all!" replied Mr. Tapner. "You can fine me what the devil you like!"

CHAPTER CXLV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL PROPOSE A SCHEME OF FUGITIVE OPERATIONS, AND ELECT DICK TURPIN CAPTAIN.

WHATEVER amount of prudence the governor may have possessed, it was pretty clear by this last defiant speech of his that the whole of it had departed.

The Lord Mayor looked all the surprise he felt.

"Mr. Tapner," he said, "I shall report this to the Secretary of State, and insist upon an investigation of your conduct being made."

"Do that, sir," said Tom; "and the result will be that he will lose his office, and it is a disgrace to the city so long as he retains it."

"Villain!" yelled the governor, whose rage burst forth again upon hearing the tones of Tom King's voice.

"Villain! you are the cause of all this, but you shall suffer for it."

So saying, he made a wild kind of rush at Tom.

Now, the reader must bear in mind that King was not fettered in any way, although two men had hold of him by the shoulder.

Accordingly, when the governor came towards him, he, in the most natural manner possible, lifted his left hand and gave him such a crack between the eyes, that the governor fell flat down on the floor, as though he had been shot.

"Take that as a receipt in full of the little account between us," said Tom. "I hope you saw, gentlemen, that if I had not defended myself, he would have done me a mischief."

"Upon my word this transcends all I ever saw or heard of," exclaimed the Lord Mayor. "Officers, remove the prisoner to his cell at once, and in the meantime we will have the affair between Mr. Tapner and Mr. Blandy gone into."

Tom suffered himself to be led away unresistingly, but he felt much better now that he had really paid back to the governor some of the harsh usage he had received at his hands.

"I'm blest," said one of the turnkeys, as they led their prisoner to the condemned cell. "I'm blest if this isn't the rummiest start that ever I heard on. I knew old Tapner would drop into it some day, he is so werry violent."

"Serves him right," said the other. "Tom, that was a first-rate blow you gave him. Right in between his eyes."

Tom King made no reply to these remarks from his janitors, and they put him in the condemned cell.

It was the duty of these men not upon any account to lose sight of their prisoner, so they sat down with him much in the manner Biggs and Wilson had done.

Tom was still without his irons, nor would they, without orders from the governor, be put upon him; but for all that he was quite without a hope of making his escape.

After all that had occurred on that, to him, eventful day, he felt it no little relief to lie down upon his rude couch, and try to think.

As he did so, and weighed over all the circumstances carefully in his mind, he was ready to give himself up to despair.

There was no way that he could see in which his friend could rescue him. The authorities had, as Mr. Tapner said, one and all made up their minds that he should hang, and having come to such a determination, and knowing the character of the prisoner and his friends,

they would not be likely to omit anything in the shape of precaution.

We may as well say here that Mr. Tapner was suspended, and a deputy appointed in his stead, who was to act as governor until the charges brought against his predecessor were disposed of.

This deputy was a man who had long been on the look-out for the situation of governor of Newgate, and as he had influence, had been promised it so soon as it should become vacant.

It was pretty clear that Mr. Tapner would be discharged, so this deputy determined upon using the utmost vigilance, so that he might be appointed to the vacant place.

Knowing, then, the fears that were entertained that the prisoner, Thomas King, would make an escape, and that his accomplices might be expected to take some energetic, daring steps to set him free, he resolved to try if he could not keep him secure.

The determination to hang the notorious highwayman was well known to him, so immediately upon being invested with authority he had Tom heavily ironed, and, moreover, secured to the wall, while four men, instead of two, were placed in the cell to guard him.

They were regularly relieved at intervals of two hours.

When Tom saw this he indeed gave himself up to despair, and trembled with the dread that his friends might make a fruitless effort to save him, which would result in their capture.

And so the day wearily passed away.

It was at that time the custom for a condemned man to receive as many visitors as often as he liked in his cell, and to be indulged with whatever things he thought proper.

On the day after the trial old Matthew came to see Tom.

The interview took place in the presence of the four men, so that little could be said.

Tom managed, however, to convey in a whisper the hope that Dick and his comrades would not risk their lives by attempting to take him out of Newgate, for sentinals were posted at every available spot, and an alarm could be instantly communicated.

To this old Matthew bid him to be of good cheer, that the highwaymen had sworn to save him from death, and they would do it, let what obstacles would arise.

But all this was conveyed with great difficulty, owing to the presence of the four men.

When Matthew had departed, however, Tom felt himself much easier in his mind than he had before his visit; he had reliance upon the power of his friends to save him.

But Tom's life, during the four days that preceded the one fixed for his execution, was monotonous enough, and too devoid of interest for it to be entertaining to our readers to describe it in detail.

Let it suffice to say that during the time Mr. Colley, the ordinary, was very attentive to him. Indeed, since the downfall of his coadjutor, he had very much altered his behaviour.

At length Sunday came.

The execution was to take place at Tyburn at twelve o'clock on Monday.

Tom maintained his composure.

In the afternoon Matthew paid him another visit, during which he managed to let Tom know that active exertions were being made to save him, and that he was to hope up to the last moment, and by no means to let his courage fail him.

This he promised to do.

And now we feel that we can leave him, and devote our attention exclusively to the proceedings of his friends.

It will be remembered that the last time they were brought, but particularly under the notice of the reader was when, having arrived at the "White Horse," they had, by the advice of old Matthew, made their way up stairs to a sleeping apartment, in order to obtain a few hours' rest and sleep.

Scarcely had the sun rose, then, on the following morning, than the three highwaymen awoke, and hastily attiring themselves, went down stairs to the latter parlour behind the bar, where they found old Matthew waiting for them.

A substantial breakfast was placed upon the table, to which they did ample justice.

"And now," said old Matthew, as he looked up at the dingy-faced eight-day clock in the corner, "it is just a quarter to seven. The judges will take their seats at ten, so we must be at the Old Bailey at least an hour before that time."

"Well," said Claude, "what of that?"

"It will never do for you to walk up to the Sessions House dressed as you now are. You would be suspected, if not recognised at once. Dick knows the way to an old costumier's at the corner of Hart-street, Covent-garden, who disguised him once."

"And well he did it," replied Turpin. "I shall never forget my astonishment when he led me to a looking-glass and showed me, not myself, but an old, wrinkled, bowed-down farmer."

"He is second to none in his skill in disguising people. He first learned the art by dressing actors for the stage, and he has made it a kind of study. I dare venture to say that when you go to him he will disguise you so well that you shall neither of you know each other."

"If he does that," said Sixteen-String Jack, "he is a clever artificer indeed, but you will excuse me for saying that I doubt it."

"I can easily understand your doing that," rejoined the landlord, "but you will nevertheless find that I am no more than right. If you will take my advice, you will start off and see him at once, before many people get in the streets. It would be dangerous if you were to be seen to go in by some prying, meddling fellow, and then not to come out again."

"Leave that to me," said Turpin; "I know the way, and I know the old man. He won't be sorry to have me again for a customer, for I paid him liberally the last time for his trouble. Come, my friends, are you ready?"

"Quite," said Claude and Jack. "Lead on, captain."

"I shall object to you applying that title to me."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I do not deserve it any more than you do."

"Pho! pho! Dick, listen to me," said Claude Duval. "Jack and myself have talked the matter over between us. We have agreed to rescue Tom, have we not?"

"We have," replied Dick, "and we will do it."

"Of course. We need not be uneasy about that, and when we have done it we agreed to form ourselves into a band of four, and perform such exploits as should make our names remembered for ever, even as Robin Hood's is to this day."

"We did—we did!"

"Very well, then. Four men cannot act in concert without a leader. That is true, is it not?"

"Perfectly true," replied Dick Turpin. "No army could gain a victory without a general."

"That is just the remark Claude made when I spoke to him upon the subject," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, such being the case, we must look upon ourselves as an army, and choose a general. We have resolved that it shall be you."

"Of course I feel flattered at your preference," said Dick; "but we need Tom's consent first."

"Not so," the majority of votes will decide the question, though I know well enough he will agree to it at once."

"Well, if you will have it so," said Turpin, "it is not for me to say not."

"Of course not," said Claude.

"We have determined, as I said, to form ourselves into a band of four," continued Sixteen-String Jack. "You shall be our leader. You will then act only under your commands."

"Well—well," said Turpin, "let us talk further about that when Tom King is amongst us."

"Certainly; but do you not see the advantages that would ensue from such an arrangement? We should be able to defy all efforts at capture, for, together, we should be a match for more than twice our number, and what traveller would be in a position to resist us?"

"No one!" laughed Dick; "that would be a merry time."

"We will take only from those who can afford to lose," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, whenever we have an opportunity, hold out a helping hand to those in distress. In fine, we will, if you like it, constitute ourselves the

champions of innocence against wrong, as the knight errants did of old, and our chief business shall be to redress grievances and succour the unfortunate."

"It is a grand and noble purpose," said Turpin; "and I shall feel proud to be at the head of such a confederation. I am firmly of opinion that we shall be the means of foiling the machinations of many evil ones against the good; and let us hope that the performance of every one of these deeds will weigh in our favour against those crimes we have from time to time committed."

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THE COSTUMIER'S HOUSE FULL OF DANGER.

It's a very fine for you three to stand chattering there, laying your plans for the future," said old Matthew Gale, in a good-tempered voice, as soon as Dick Turpin had finished speaking. "I say, it's all very fine, but in my humble opinion it would look far better if you would proceed to action."

"You are right," they cried, "it is quite time for action now, or we shall not be in time to get in."

"Follow Dick," said Matthew, "he knows the way to the old crib; he has been there before."

"Yes—yes!" said Turpin. "I will go out first, and you two can follow me at a little distance. We shall not be so likely to excite suspicion then!"

"Do you think there is any danger?" asked Claude.

"No more than usual. It is best to be cautious, and at this hour the streets begin to fill with people."

"They do—they do! and so the sooner you start the better."

"Look after Black Bess, Matthew," said Turpin, to the landlord, as he left the little parlour.

"Don't be afraid of that, she will be all right!"

"I knew I can trust her to your care."

"You can, Dick, with every safety. I would not have anything happen to her while she was under my charge for all the world. When you leave Hart-street, you had better make your way direct to the Old Bailey. I shall be there among the other spectators, and it will be the best plan, if you should happen to see me, not to recognise me."

"Of course! I'm off! Now, my friends, follow me! I shall cross Drury-lane and go down Russell-street, by the side of the theatre."

"Right!"

Turpin, assuming the air of a casual visitor to the inn, sauntered quietly along the passage, and stood calmly for a minute at the door.

He looked up and down the street.

To have seen him, one would have set him down as an idler, who had nowhere particular to go, and was debating which direction he should take.

It was a finished piece of acting.

It was done with an important motive in view.

Litlessly as his eyes appeared to wander about, yet in reality his glance was never more keen.

His object was to ascertain that there was no foe of his in sight.

The coast appeared quite clear. A good many people, of course, were in the street, considering the time in the morning, but that they were all ordinary pedestrians intent upon their own business, he was pretty certain.

Having assured himself of this, still keeping up the character of an idler, which he had assumed, he stepped off the doorstep and strolled up Drury-lane.

He went nearly as far as the corner of Princes-street, and then he crossed over to the corner of the theatre.

As he did so, he cast a hasty glance in the direction whence he had come, and saw, to his great satisfaction, his two friends walking along arm in arm.

They crossed over a little lower down.

Now that he knew they must have him in sight, Dick did not venture to look behind him again, but once more crossing over near the stage door of the theatre, he turned down Crown-court, which place is well known to many of our readers because it is there that the celebrated Dr. Cumming's Chapel is situated.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that it has been built since Dick Turpin's time, and that the court itself

was not then the smooth, clean, well-paved, respectable thoroughfare that it is now.

On the contrary, it was rather notorious as the residence of several desperate characters, whose occupation was, for the most part, nocturnal.

Along this court, then, to its junction with Martlett's court, Dick Turpin went at a steady pace.

Turning round to his left, about fifty more steps took him into Bow-street, a few yards only above where the well-known police-office is situated.

Before he emerged into this last-named thoroughfare, he thought his most prudent plan would be to reconnoitre.

Accordingly placing his hand against the wall, he leaned forward, so that he could take a good look down the street.

While thus engaged, Claude and Jack came up with him.

"Is it all right?" asked the latter.

"I think so," replied Dick. "I see nothing suspicious."

"Then we will venture."

"In a minute, I will show you the house first."

"Do so—do so!"

"You see that large building, there, nearly opposite?"

"You mean Covent Garden Theatre?"

"I do."

"Of course!"

"Then perhaps you also know that that very narrow street running down by the side of it furthest from here is Hart-street."

"No I did not know that."

"Well, it is, and that shop at the corner, where the shutters are all up, is the residence of the costumier."

"Oh!"

"I will go over first," continued Dick, "and do you wait here. I know the secret of asking for admission. As soon as you see me enter, cross over, but not before. I will leave the door ajar, so that you can push it open and enter without delay."

"Agreed; that will be the best plan to adopt, and the safest as well, I should think. Before you start, though, I should recommend you to take another look down the street."

To those who are familiar with the place, the following description will be unnecessary, but it will be interesting to those who are not.

Martlett's-court, then, is a narrow court on the east side of Bow-street, and nearly opposite the glass building attached to the Royal Italian Opera House, known as the Floral Hall.

The Bow-street police-station is about half a dozen houses lower down on the same side of the road, and nearly opposite which is the court, where the magistrate sits every morning.

In this narrow passage, which is more like the entrance to a house than anything else, our three friends could stand very well concealed.

Dick was able, therefore, by peeping round the corner, and only permitting just the top of his head to be visible, to see right down the street, past the police-station, for the street in that part curves round a little.

As upon the former occasion all seemed quite well. Even the one police officer, who was nearly always to be seen standing at the door of the station, was just at that time absent from his post.

Dick Turpin, perceiving all was well, made a sign with his hands to his friends to remain where they were, and crossed over.

Claude and Jack Rann watched him with the greatest attention go up the two steps before the door of the costumier's abode, and then almost disappear in the depths of the old-fashioned doorway.

It was now more than ever necessary for them to be upon the alert to watch for the door opening.

It was full five minutes though before it did, and their patience was by that time well nigh exhausted.

They then crossed over.

The door was ajar, as Dick had told them it would be, and they were inside in a trice.

The old costumier, looking older, dirtier, and untidier than before, stood just inside the shop with an unnaturally thin candle in his trembling grasp.

And now, if either of the three highwaymen could have seen into the street, they would have perceived something

which would have convinced them that their situation in the old costumier's shop was one of extreme danger.

From the shadow of a doorway adjoining Martlett's-court there emerged a bulky figure.

As he came fully out into the faint morning light his costume could be seen to be that of a police-officer.

He put his finger to the side of his nose, while a look of intense cunning overspread his face.

"Werry suspicious circumstance, indeed," he said; "and werry suspicious-looking characters, too. If I didn't know he was out of the country, I should say one of the two that crossed over last was Claude Duval! Who knows, he may have come back, and, if it should turn out to be him, what a capital thing it will be for me! I will just cross over after them and put my ear to the keyhole of the door. Likely enough I shall hear something that will repay me for my trouble."

In pursuance of this determination, the "active and enterprising officer," as the newspaper reporter would call him, crossed the street and put his ear against the panel of the door.

But, although he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, he could hear nothing but the murmuring of voices, without being able to distinguish what was said.

Finding this to be the case, he gave up the hope of learning anything by that means, and he bethought himself of another.

He put his eye to the keyhole.

And here arose one advantage from the feeble light the old man carried. The officer could just see into the shop, but none of the objects were distinctly defined.

The circumstance of his not being able to hear what was said can only be attributed to the fact that our friends were very careful to speak only just above a whisper, and, as for the old man himself, his voice was weak and tremulous from age and weakness.

These little obstacles had the very natural effect of inflaming the officer's curiosity, but he could see no way in which he could satisfy it.

After trying to peep through the chinks in the window-shutters, and finding it impossible, he gave up the attempt in despair.

"Now what will be the best thing I can do?" he said to himself, reflectively. "Oh! there goes Tom Price; I'll ask him."

Hereupon the officer beckoned to one of his brethren, who was coming slowly from the direction of Long-acre.

"Tom," he whispered, making a kind of tube with his hand to convey the sound. "Tom!"

"Wot's the row, now?"

"Hush! Come here."

The officer, who had been named by his companion Tom Price, was so impressed with the mysterious manner of his friend, that he surmised something very particular was up, and he approached him with stealthy steps.

"Tom Price," said the first officer, as he caught the person he addressed by the collar, and pulled him towards him. "Tom Price!"

"What is it? Speak, and don't be a fool!"

"I've seen three suspicious-looking individuals come out of Martlett's-court."

"Did you? When?"

"Just a minute or two ago, and they went into this shop in a very mysterious way, and they haven't come out yet."

The two officers endeavoured to look profoundly wise.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

MR. WRIGGLES IS DETERMINED NOT TO BE THIS TIME BAULKED OF HIS PREY.

"WHAT sort of looking coves was they, Gibbs?" asked Price, after a pause.

"Ah! there's the most important thing. Unless I make a great mistake, they are all three high tobymen, for that's just what they look like!"

"The devil!"

"You may well say that!"

"But didn't you recognize them?"

"Well, I can't say I did; but if it had not been that he's out of the country!"

"Who?"

"Why, Claude Duval! If I didn't know he was out of England, I should say one was Claude Duval!"

"He may have come back."

"That's what I think. Suppose it should be him."

"What's the reward?"

"I don't know. Something handsome, you may depend."

"And they all three went into that shop, you say?"

"They did. 'I seed 'em with my own eyes."

"Why, its the old theatrical property-shop."

"I knows that."

"Then I shouldn't wonder if they haven't gone in to disguise themselves."

This was so probable a supposition that they both jumped to the conclusion that it must be correct.

"Its a lucky thing for us, Tom. Let's go to the station, and lay the information."

"Very good."

"Yet, stop! There's no occasion for us both to go. You stay here, and keep watch while I run across myself."

"Agreed; but don't be no longer nor you can help."

"Trust me for that," said Gibbs, as he ran off. "You mind and keep a sharp eye on the premises."

At the rate the officer went at, it did not take him above half-a-minute to reach the police-station.

"Where's Mr. Wiggles?" he cried. "Where's Mr. Wiggles?"

"He's out."

At this moment there was a clatter of horses' hoofs, and a party of mounted officers rode up to the door.

There was a few minutes' confusion, and then the whole troop alighted.

Foremost amongst them was our old acquaintance, Wiggles, the chief police officer, and who we have lost sight of for such a long time.

Gibbs stepped forward.

"Mr. Wiggles," he said, "Mr. Wiggles."

"Well, what is it?"

"If you please, sir, as I was on my beat I saw somebody's head peeping out of Martlett's-court!"

"Make haste with your story."

"Yes, Mr. Wiggles, I won't detain you above a minute. 'Thinks I, 'That's suspicious,' so I hid in a doorway close by, and presently I saw a man come out of the court, and cross the street. Where do you think he went, sir?"

"How the devil should I know! Go on with your story."

"He went into the old theatrical property-shop at the corner of Hart-street."

"Well!"

"He looked a very suspicious character, and I said to myself, 'That's a highwayman!'"

"A highwayman?"

"Just so, Mr. Wiggles, and then, having heard some talking going on in the court, though I could not hear what was said, I waited where I was expecting to see more; and sure enough I was repaid for my trouble, for in about five minutes two suspicious characters came out of the court, crossed over the street, and went into the property-shop."

"Two, do you say?"

"Yes, and they looked as much like highwaymen as we do like police officers."

"I'm jigger'd!" ejaculated Mr. Wiggles, "if it ain't them, sure enough."

"Who, sir?"

"Never mind—go on."

Gibbs now perceived there was something peculiar in the manner of the officers who had just returned with Mr. Wiggles, and he wondered what it meant.

"Go on," said Mr. Wiggles: "did you recognise either of them?"

"No, sir, I didn't; but, as I said before, if I didn't know he was out of the country."

"Yes, yes."

"I should say one of 'em was Claude Duval, for I never saw such a remarkable likeness in my life."

No sooner did he hear these words, than Mr. Wiggles behaved in the most extraordinary manner.

Gibbs thought he had clean gone mad.

And well he might.

He seized hold of him (Gibbs) by the hand, and almost wrung it off.

Then, uttering a cry which sounded more like a wild Indian's war whoop than anything else, he took off his hat and threw it up in the air.

Gibbs stood perfectly agast.

The other officers, too, evidently shared in their chief's gratification, though they were not quite so demonstrative.

"Nabbed," cried Mr. Wiggles, "nabbed! I've nabbed them at last. Hurrah!"

"Who, sir, who?" asked Gibbs, timidly.

"Who? Why, Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack! They have all three been upon the north road, and have robbed one of his majesty's tax collectors of a bag containing upwards of five hundred guineas."

This was a piece of information that completely took Gibbs' breath away.

"Then Claude has returned?" he gasped.

"He has, and he is in company with Turpin and Sixteen-String Jack."

"Then I claim the reward," cried Gibbs, "for they are all there in the costumer's shop at this blessed minute, and Tom Price is on the watch so that they don't leave it."

"Capital. Come on, my men. This will be the best morning's work we have done for a long time. Come on."

In a desultory throng the officers, to the number of seven or eight, followed Mr. Wiggles and Gibbs to the costumer's shop.

There they found Tom Price on the watch, who quickly assured them that no living creature had left the place.

"Then they are still inside a disguising of themselves, you may depend," said Gibbs.

"They are as good as nabbed then," said Mr. Wiggles, who, as the reader will know by the words he had uttered, had found the tax gatherer the three friends had plundered.

It now became necessary to dispose of his force to the best advantage, and with as much rapidity as possible, and in this Mr. Wiggles showed himself an able general.

A man was taking down the shutters of the shop in Bow-street, next door to the costumer's, and so he entered without difficulty, and quickly made the inmates aware of what was going on, at the same time calling upon them in the king's name to aid and assist him to the utmost of their power.

All the aid and assistance he then happened to want was merely for them to allow his men to go up to the top of the house.

He selected six for this duty, and instructed them to make an entrance into the next house as quietly as they could, and descend until they found those of whom they were in search.

This the six men set about readily enough. To reach the roof of the costumer's house was to them a matter of very small difficulty indeed, and there they found, as is usual in London houses, a trap-door in the roof, to enable the inmates to escape in case of fire.

This trap-door they found was secured on the inner side, but the fastenings were old and rusty, and gave way beneath the pressure they applied.

Having done so much, they left one of their number on guard at the trap, while the remainder slunk quietly down stairs.

In order that the highwaymen should be completely taken by surprise, Mr. Wiggles sent across to the station for a reinforcement, while he disposed the four other men, including Gibbs and Price, in such positions as to make it utterly impossible for them to leave the premises without being seen by one or other of them.

By the time he had done this, some dozen more men arrived, and placing himself at the head of the largest half of these, the others being employed as sentinels, he advanced to the front door of the shop, and knocked loudly at it, commanding them to open in the king's name.

Of course no notice was taken of this, so it was repeated three times, after which it would be lawful for them to break down the door.

By this it will be seen that Mr. Wiggles' calculations were by no means badly made. He reckoned by the time he had broken down the door the men whom he had sent to make the surreptitious entry would be ready to surprise them in the rear.

Of course these energetic proceedings, accompanied, as they were, with a great deal of noise, had the effect of attracting a large body of people, and the crowd kept increasing every moment.

From all possible directions they came, creaking completely all the contiguous thoroughfares.

This, so far as the officers were concerned, was a fortunate enough circumstance, since it made it quite a matter of impossibility for either of the fugitives to leave the house they had so incautiously entered.

Success seemed to wait this time upon Mr. Wriggles, and he was in a state of the greatest gratification imaginable. Not only would a good share of the joint reward, which was offered for the apprehension of the three criminals, fall to his share, but he had as well a feeling of personal revenge against one of them at least.

It might therefore be expected that he would not be behindhand in doing his utmost to capture and lodge them in Newgate.

For the third time the command to open the door in the king's name was given by Mr. Wriggles himself, in his loudest tones, and then, as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he gave his men the signal to make their attack upon the door.

This they immediately did, and being provided with the tools necessary for the purpose, they, in a few moments, beat the door down from its hinges.

Calling, then, upon the highwaymen to surrender, they all made a terrific rush into the shop, followed by the foremost of the crowd.

But before we relate what next took place, and how the men fared who had made their way in by the roof, we will turn back to that point in our narrative when we left our three friends face to face with the old costumier, and relate what ensued thereupon.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SEEMS INEVITABLE, BUT THE OLD COSTUMIER PROVES A FRIEND IN NEED.

"I REMEMBER you now, munificent sir," said the old man, as he held up the light in such a way that its beams fell upon Dick's countenance. "I have before had the pleasure of being of service to you."

"You are right," replied Turpin, "you have; and I require your aid again. These are friends of mine, and we have all been sent here by Matthew Gale."

"That is enough, gentlemen—quite enough. I require no other reference or recommendation. I am ready to do your bidding. Let me know your commands."

"We all three want a tolerably good disguise apiece, for which we are willing to pay liberally."

"I have before had a sample of your bounty, good sir."

"You shall be equally well treated if you do the job this time as well, and with expedition."

"It is a work of time, gentlemen."

"I am aware of that. Still, these disguises need not be so elaborate as the former one was. If you will select three suitable suits of clothes, we will soon have them on, and you can finish us off."

"Just so, gentlemen. Look here! You can take choice of these; they are all of the proper size."

Neither of the highwaymen spent much time in making their selection.

They chose three suits of a plain description, such as any commonplace person might wear.

This done, they proceeded to put the clothes on, which they did over those they were then wearing.

While they were thus occupied, the old man looked about among some wigs and hats.

These he handed to our friends, and then they one by one came in for a share of his attention.

Dick and Claude had already passed his hands and were in readiness, and Jack was all but done, when they all heard the unusual bustle in the street consequent upon the arrival of the police.

"Hark!" said Dick. "There is danger! I am sure of it. Someone has tracked us here, and made the officers aware of it."

"Nonsense."

"Silence, if you please," interrupted the old man. "If you will allow me I will go away and return with an account of what is going on outside."

"Do so," said Turpin. "I know I can trust you, or Gale would not have sent us here. Bring back the information we require, and you shall be rewarded sufficiently to satisfy you."

"I make no doubt of that," said the old man, with an

avaricious grin. "I will not be long, good sirs. I will take the candle with me; you won't mind being in the dark. It will be safer, too, as well. There are curious old places in the house which no one knows of except myself, and I can easily get the information you desire."

So saying, the old man took up the miserable candle and left the shop.

He was not away above three minutes, but to our three friends they seemed like three hours.

"Well?" they asked, eagerly, as soon as he reappeared.

He placed his fingers on his lips for them to be silent, and then drawing close to them, he spoke in a whisper.

"The house is surrounded by police officers. Some are at this moment in the upper portion of this house, and which they will have some trouble in leaving, I rather think. At the front door of the shop is a body of men, who are armed with hammers and bars which look as though they intended to force an entrance."

"This is startling and alarming news, indeed," said Dick Turpin. "What is to be done?"

At this moment it was that they heard Mr. Wriggles for the first time call out and command them to open in the king's name.

"Cannot you help us?" continued Turpin, turning to the trembling old man. "You tell us there are curious places in the house which are known to you alone. Is there one which will be of service to us in the present emergency, because if there is, name your own price, and you shall have it."

"It is in my power," said the costumier, "to take you to a place of perfect safety."

"And you will do it?"

"I will."

"That is well, but there is no time to lose, for, hark! there is the second command to open."

"All right. They must repeat the words a third time before they dare venture to break in, and before then you will be in a place of safety."

This was a most welcome piece of intelligence to our friends, who at first had felt something very like despair creep over them.

And now they heard quite plainly a hammering noise from somewhere overhead.

"That is the other party of officers. They will have a door or two to break down before they can reach us. This way, gentlemen—this way."

The costumier led the three highwaymen from the shop into the little parlour behind it as he spoke.

He carefully closed the door after him and secured it.

By the time this was done Mr. Wriggles had, for the third time, repeated the command, and then he shouted in loud enough tone for them to hear—

"I call upon you all to surrender! We are here in full force, and to hope to escape is sheer folly! We are bound to take you, dead or alive, so give yourselves up at once, and do not force us to use unnecessary violence! Surrender, I say, or the door will be broken down."

Mr. Wriggles waited a minute or so, to see whether any heed would be paid to it, and then he gave the signal to his men to attack and break open the door as we have already described.

"Now, gentlemen," said the costumier, "place faith in me, and act according to my instructions, and all will be well. Do you promise this?"

"Willingly, because it is the only chance we see of being able to effect our escape."

"Look here, then."

With some surprise, mixed with curiosity, they followed the old man to a cupboard on one side of the fire-place, on the other side of which was a precisely similar in appearance.

The door of the one to which he led them, the old man opened.

They saw that it reached nearly from the floor to the ceiling.

It was not fitted inside with shelves as they expected, but round the three sides of it a great many pegs had been placed, upon which hung clothing in both plenty and variety, and, in fact, it seemed quite full.

But though bulky, the things were yielding, and they easily pushed them aside.

"Walk in there, gentlemen, if you please."

Turpin and Claude Duval did so, but Jack held back.

"You don't mean to say this is the hiding-place you spoke of. If it is, I would rather be out of it than in it. You trust the mad officers will find us there immediately."

"You promised to place yourself under my directions."

"I did," said Jack, "and I will do so."

As he spoke, he stepped into the cupboard, closely followed by the old man, who shut the door carefully behind him.

They were not a moment too soon, for a grana crash reached their ears, which showed that the front door had been broken down.

"Stand still and upright all of you," said the old man, in a faint whisper. "You had better take hold of each other. I am going to touch a spring, which will let the bottom of the cupboard down."

The place was profoundly dark, but they obeyed the old man's words.

They could not see what he was about, but they heard a faint clicking noise, like the cocking of a pistol, and then they felt the floor of the cupboard slowly and silently descend with them.

The descent lasted nearly two minutes, although the distance was not above ten feet, but, as we have said, the floor of the cupboard sank with slowness.

A slight shock made them aware they had reached the bottom, but all was as dark as before, so they could not form an idea of what kind of place they were in.

"Step forward without fear. I shall have a light in a moment."

"It will be safe?"

"Quite."

The old man produced some phosphorous matches, by the aid of which he lighted a piece of candle, and when it fairly burnt up, our friends were able to see dimly about them.

They were standing at the extremity of a vaulted passage.

"This way, gentlemen, if you please," said the costurmer, who stepped into it. "This way."

Our friends followed.

"And now I will show you the excellence of this contrivance, and, at the same time, convince you that you are perfectly safe. Watch me. My actions will be sufficient to explain to you, without words."

Hearing this, the three highwaymen looked keenly at what the old man was about to do.

The reader must please bear in mind, too, that though it has taken some time for us to describe all the particulars, yet, in reality, all took place in an incredible short space of time.

As our friends stood just within the vaulted passage, they could see the grooves into which the floor of the cupboard fitted.

The old man touched a spring, and then the square piece of wood, which formed the bottom of the cupboard, began to rise again.

They watched it go up and up until it was lost to sight, and presently they heard a snap.

"There," said the old man, "all's safe now. They will open the cupboard, no doubt, but they will find nothing suspicious in it, and the floor will be as solid as that of any cupboard, and unless they know the secret of the spring, I defy them to reach it."

"Whereabouts are we now?" asked Turpin.

"Underneath the pavement of Hart-street," was the reply. "Follow me. We have nothing to fear now from the officers, and you will see something which will surprise you not a little."

"But we have no time to spare," said the highwaymen. "Every moment is of importance to us."

"That I do not for a moment doubt, but, for all that, you will have to remain quiet somewhere until the mob disperse. Look here!"

The old man opened a door at the extremity of the passage as he spoke, and what they saw beyond it did indeed fill our friends with surprise.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

MR. WRIGGLES IS AGAIN DISAPPOINTED; AND THE HIGHWAYMEN PAY A VISIT TO THE FAMILY AT THE "FALLEN TUNE."

No words of ours, however apt or well chosen they might be, could convey to the reader a just idea of the intense

disappointment experienced by Mr. Wiggles and his officers when, upon rushing into the shop, they found it perfectly vacant, and exhibiting no signs whatever of disorder or recent occupation.

The hammering above, which was caused by his first detachment of men trying to break down a strong door which barred their further progress, still continued.

There was a miscellaneous enough assortment of goods in the shop, and it was pretty full, still it did not take them two minutes to assure themselves that there was no one in it.

The little door leading out of it into the parlour next attracted their notice. It was fastened, but they soon had it open.

By the order of Mr. Wiggles—who began to have a disagreeable conviction creep over him that he had expended all his wonderful ingenuity and taken all his trouble for nothing—by his orders, we say, some of the men were sent up stairs to see whether they could not unfasten the door the others were endeavouring to batter down.

The little back parlour underwent a most rigid examination. There was not a single article in it which was not turned over and examined. The cupboard was opened and ransacked, all its contents one by one taken out, until it was quite empty, but all in vain.

Still Mr. Wiggles had an idea that there might be some secret connected with the cupboard, and he sounded the sides and the back with the stock of a pistol, but the dull sound produced was pretty good evidence that all was solid behind.

Then, as for the floor, the suspicion of its being moveable never once entered his mind. Besides, had he not stood on it and found it secure.

The conviction that his prey had escaped him impressed itself still more strongly and strongly upon him.

Some curses of a very awful and diabolical description came from his lips, which it is by no means our intention to repeat.

Every moment, now, that elapsed saw his hopes grow fainter and fainter.

There was not a corner in the house that was left unsearched.

But, of course, there was no result.

The officers, one and all, looked very blankly at each other, and especially Gibbs and Price—they were actually agast.

But leaving the officers to get over their surprise and rage in the best manner they are able, and leaving them to their vain search in the costurmer's abode, we will return to the vaulted passage in which we left Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, and the curious old man.

The place into which they had emerged was underneath the stage of Covent-garden Theatre.

One glance was sufficient to show them that.

"You scarcely expected this, did you?" But the fact is, I told you I was once connected with this place, and the passage you have seen was contrived for the convenience of a certain manager."

"Oh! indeed!"

"And then when I took to that house, and used to prepare the actors for the stage, I often used to avail myself of this mode of getting here."

"I suppose so."

"I had an idea, somehow or other, that one of these odd days it would prove useful, and so it has."

"Without something of the kind," said Turpin, "we should certainly by this time have been in the hands of the Philistines."

"Lead on," said Jack, "cannot you show us a way out of this place?"

"I dare say I can, but you must be careful that no one sees you emerge."

"To be sure."

"Up these steps, then."

The trio followed the old man up a flight of narrow steps, and then stood upon the stage itself.

The interior of the theatre looked like some vast cavern in the intense darkness, for what windows there were in the building, had been carefully blocked up.

It was quite evident the old man was well acquainted with the labyrinthine intricacies of the theatre, for he threaded his way through a forest of ropes and screens with the greatest ease.



[TURPIN, DUVAL, AND RANN RESCUING TOM KING.]

At length he stopped near a small door in the wall.

"There!" he said, "is the place at which the actors enter and emerge. It opens into Covent-garden Market. As I said, all you have got to do is to take care that no one observes you leave, for if they do, the circumstance will be sure to give birth to suspicion, for this happens to be an hour when the theatre is never visited."

"I understand."

"Have you the means of opening the door?" asked Jack Rann.

"I have."

"Then open it just the least bit in the world, so that we can take a peep and see whether there is anyone outside or not."

"I am at your commands, noble sir," said the old man, as he proceeded to unfasten the door.

Having done so, he just opened it about half an inch, and closed it again with great rapidity.

"What is it?" asked the highwaymen.

"Nothing much," was the reply. "There is a police-officer standing there, and apparently with his attention wholly fixed upon this door."

"The deuce there is!"

"There is, indeed!"

"But it will never do to be kept prisoners here by one officer," said Dick Turpin; "we must take some decisive steps at once."

"What shall we do?"

"I hardly know; and yet I think the best thing to do will be to take another peep; and if he is still there, endeavour to decoy him in here by some means."

"Let that be it, then," said Claude. "I can't think of anything better, can you, Jack?"

"No."

"Let us set about it at once."

"You will do it, Dick?"

"Yes, as I proposed the scheme. You three stand a little, and I will open the door again, and peep out."

CHAPTER CL.

OLD MATTHEW SUGGESTS TO DICK TURPIN A MEANS OF GETTING OUT OF HIS DIFFICULTY.

Agreeably to these instructions, the old costumier drew back, and Claude and Jack took up their positions close to the door.

Dick Turpin next proceeded, with all the caution possible, to draw the door the least bit open. He wanted to get it wide enough to be able to see outside without the officer being aware of it.

Fortunately the inside of the theatre was not only dark, but the doorway itself, owing to its position in the large building, was in deep shadow.

Sure enough, there was a police officer, with, apparently, his eyes fixed upon the little door.

Whether this really was so, or whether it was the result of accident, Dick could not tell.

And now how to proceed, so as to effectually prevent the man from giving the alarm, was rather a difficult question.

Dick looked out, but there appeared to be no other living creature, besides the police-officer, anywhere in sight.

Dick opened the door a little wider.

"Hist!" he said, at the same time beckoning to the officer to advance. "Hist!"

The officer saw the door open, and an ordinary-looking man appear at it, and heard him cry, "Hist!"

Now it will be as well here to state that this man was quite in ignorance of Mr. Wiggles's movements. He was, in fact, merely upon night duty, and happened to be standing where he was by the merest chance in the world.

Surmising that something unusual was going on, and not for a moment anticipating that he should run into any particular danger, he unsuspectingly advanced towards the door.

This was precisely the result which Turpin hoped for and expected, so opening the door a little farther, taking care to stand as much as possible behind it, he again mysteriously beckoned the officer to approach.

On he came.

"Now!" whispered Dick to Claude, who happened to be nearest to him. "While I keep his attention wholly occupied, you spring out and drag him in."

By the time he had concluded this hurried speech, the officer reached the door.

"What is it?" he said. "What do?"

What more he was going to say is unknown, for Claude just at that moment sprang forward, and putting one arm round his middle, and the other hand over his mouth, dragged him inside.

He was too much astonished to resist, until it was too late.

Dick shut the door instantly.

Claude shifted his grasp to the man's throat.

He struggled desperately, but it was of no avail.

"A rope!" cried Sixteen-String Jack; "find us a rope, and then all will be secure."

"Yes, noble sir," said the old costumier; "bring him this way, and I will show you plenty of the article you require."

"Lead on, then."

Between our three powerful friends, the officer had not the smallest chance.

The old costumier still held the light, and they followed him to a good-sized room, which was piled with miscellaneous lumber of all kinds, and especially old scenes, with the necessary rope tackle for moving it.

With some of this they very quickly tied the unfortunate officer hand and foot.

Then they closed the door, and repaired once more to the entrance.

"I believe," said the old costumier, "that you are now free to leave this place. You are disguised, but still I should recommend you to be cautious in your movements."

"Do not fear," said Dick. "Before we go, however, take this purse. I do not know how much it contains, but it is a heavy one. We are grateful for the service you have rendered us to-night, for had it not been for you we should, by this time, have been in the hands of the officers. You will see us again before long! Good morning!"

"Good morning, noble sirs!" said the old costumier, with a low bow, as the three highwaymen, one after the other, cautiously emerged into Covent-garden Market, and were quickly lost to sight.

The moment they felt sure they were secure from observation, the three highwaymen came to a halt.

"It is quite time we were at the Old Bailey," said Dick Turpin. "I am afraid, now, we shall have some trouble in gaining admittance."

"So do I," said Jack.

"And after what has just occurred, it will be trebly perilous for us to go there."

"I have no doubt of that," said Dick, "but I, for one, have no intention of staying away. Listen, this will be our best plan."

"What?"

"You shall hear. Disguised as we are now, we shall be almost certain to pass unsuspected, but to add to our safety, let us separate. I will go first, then you, Jack, can follow at some distance, and Claude bring up the rear. All we shall have to do will be to take care that we do not lose sight of each other."

"That will be best."

"I am glad you think so!"

"I will cross over to the opposite side of the street," said Jack, "and Claude can follow you; we shall then still further remove suspicion."

"Just so! And, as we are agreed, let us start at once." After these words, the three highwaymen disposed themselves in the manner they had arranged, and avoiding the more populous thoroughfares, took their course in as direct a line as possible to the Old Bailey.

St. Sepulchre's clock chimed half-past nine as they reached their destination.

As usual, there was a crowd of persons about the entrance to the Sessions-house, and this was a circumstance very much in the favour of the highwaymen, for it diverted attention from them.

They were particularly careful to keep Dick in sight.

And now Turpin, for one whose person was so well-known to the police as he was, performed a very daring action, and one that made his two companions fairly hold their breath.

Walking straight up to one of the police-officers, who was standing at the foot of the staircase, he said in a feigned voice—

"We have heard there is to be a remarkable trial to-day. It is so, is it not?"

"Well, yes," said the officer, completely deceived by the appearance of the person who addressed him. "Tom King is going to be tried to-day."

"Ah!"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think," asked Dick, sinking his voice to a whisper, "that you could find us a place for a guinea, where we could see what takes place?"

"This way, please," said the police-officer. "This way, if you please."

The offer of a guinea was too much for him to withstand.

And so our three friends were comfortably installed in a front seat in the gallery, from whence a capital view of the court could be obtained.

The result of the trial has been already made known to the reader.

With an interest, which can be scarcely understood, they listened to all the proceedings.

As the counsel for the prosecution stated the case, Dick knew it was true in every particular.

Then when he heard it whispered that some months ago Tom King had robbed the judge himself of a very valuable snuff-box, he looked upon his condemnation as certain.

But, above all, he was incensed against the counsel employed by Mr. Lazenby, and for which he had said so high a price.

This, however, was unjust. The evidence was too complete, and the conviction too determined upon, for him to stand the slightest chance.

The jurymen themselves had individually felt the inconvenience and danger of travelling with money or valuables of any kind in their possession, and they looked upon it as a duty to themselves to bring this man in guilty.

So Dick and his friends waited there until the case was over and the prisoner removed.

Then they left the court.

There seemed to be no suspicion as to who they really were.

By preconcerted arrangement they all three separated, and made their way to old Matthew's crib in Drury-lane by different and circuitous routes.

Sixteen-String Jack was the first to arrive.

A word from old Matthew let him know that, at present, all was well, and that there was no new danger to apprehend.

He seated himself in the little private parlour behind the bar, already so well-known to our readers.

"I can see the result of the trial," said old Matthew, "without asking you any questions. However, it is no more than I expected."

"Nor I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Still, we won't give up."

"Not at all. I think we have as good a chance now as ever."

"Better."

"Well, I don't know exactly for that. But here's Dick."

Turpin entered the parlour as he spoke.

"Where's Claude?" he asked.

"Not arrived yet."

"He ought to have been here first. I have come the longest way. I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh! you can safely let him alone for getting out of a scrape. Ah! here he is."

Claude Duval, looking rather flushed and excited, walked into the parlour, and closed the door.

"What is the matter?" asked Dick. "How is it you are so late?"

"Confound it!" was the reply. "Just as I got to the corner of Drury-lane I met an officer who declared he knew me."

"Indeed."

"I think he mistook me for some one else."

"Not that he thought you Claude Duval?"

"No. He would have raised a greater outcry than he did. However, I was obliged to dispose of him."

"How was that?"

"Why, just where we stood I saw a cellar under a shop, where a cobbler was sitting at work, and very attentively observing us, so I caught hold of the officer by the back of the neck and the seat of his breeches, and threw him right in."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Matthew Gule. "Capital. Ha! ha!"

"He went in with a tremendous crash, I can tell you; but I did not wait to see the result, but made my way here as fast as possible, and I believe without being observed."

"That's all right, then, and even if they do come peeping and prying, I can stow you where they will never find you."

"Thanks, Matthew. You are a real friend to us. And now about Tom. What are we to do?"

"That is a serious matter, Dick," said Claude, "and we must reflect before we decide how we are to act."

"Exactly."

"What is your advice, Jack? Do you think we could do any good by breaking into Newgate?"

"I am afraid not. Rely upon it, every possible precaution will be taken to prevent his escape. They have made up their minds to hang him, and without we are very careful they will do it."

"They shall not," said Dick, "while I live. The difficulties which I have already met with, and those which I can see, so far from daunting me or turning me from my purpose, only confirm me in it. The time, now, is drawing very short, but it is yet long enough to do wonders."

"That is true enough," said Claude Duval, "but it appears to be the most difficult and dangerous affair we have ever been engaged in. I was going to say hopeless. But we are resolved to stick to you, Dick, and help you, and we'll do it."

"We will," repeated Sixteen-String Jack.

"Thanks," said Dick Turpin, as he took a hand of each in his own. "Do not think the enterprise a boneless one. I see a presentiment that we shall carry it out successfully."

"But how shall we act?"

"There I am at present at a loss, but if we all set our

minds to work we shall soon think of something I have no doubt."

"Will you allow me to make a suggestion?"

It was old Matthew who asked the question.

"Of course we will. What is it? You have been of good service to us in this way before, my friend, and we shall listen to what you have got to say with the greatest attention. What is it?"

"Really," said old Matthew, as a satisfied smile irradiated his rubicund countenance, "really, what I have to propose is so simple, that I am almost ashamed to say it after the way you have spoken, for I can tell you expect it to be something extra."

"We do! we do!"

"Then you will be disappointed, for it isn't."

"Let us hear it, and then we can judge."

"Very well, gentlemen; then what I was going to propose was, that you all three go to-night to the meeting of the family at the 'Three Tuns,' and lay the particulars of the case before them, and rely upon it they will hit upon some means of getting him free."

"Capital!" exclaimed the three friends.

Matthew looked pleased.

"That is as good a suggestion as could well be made," said Dick Turpin. "I have not ventured there since the night when Sir Theodore Houghton met with the reward he so richly deserved. That is a long time ago now, so I should think there would not be much danger in going there again."

"None at all, I should say, for no one could possibly expect you. It falls on a lucky night, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, this is Wednesday, and on Wednesday evening, as you know, there is always a full gathering."

"There is, but I had forgotten it. We will lay by for a few hours, and then we will go. I will put the case plainly before them."

And in pursuance of this determination, Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, set out from the "White Horse" in Drury-lane, to visit the thieves' ken in Seven Dials.

CHAPTER CLI.

DICK TURPIN RECEIVES AN OVATION FROM THE "FAMILY" AT THE "THREE TUNS."

A LONG, low, smoke-begimed, underground apartment, dimly lighted by tallow lips stuck in sconces, and placed at irregular distances along the walls.

In the centre a table, many feet in length, but disproportionately narrow.

Seated round it upon clumsy benches, inverted casks, and such like articles, were some forty or fifty desperate-looking men.

They were composed of one branch of the persons who in London get their living in defiance of the laws, or, as they called themselves, in their own vernacular, "the family."

The reader will remember that in the earlier portion of this story he was introduced to this apartment—if the term may be applied to such a place—as well as to some of the company in it.

It was, as we then stated, situated beneath the ground-floor of the "Three Tuns" public-house.

On this particular night—it being one upon which the whole of the "family" who possibly could do so assembled—the noise was prodigious.

The chairman, who, in accordance with custom, was installed in a wooden arm-chair, placed upon the end of the table, made vain and ineffectual attempts to restore order.

Every moment witnessed the arrival of some other member.

It was not until all assembled that the ordinary proceedings of the evening commenced.

Then the appeals of the chairman would be listened to, and tolerable silence obtained.

It was during all this wild uproar that our three friends entered.

They were far from wishing to attract attention just then, so they sat down unobserved upon the seat nearest to the door by which they entered.

It was the first time Claude Duval and Jack Rana

had seen the place, and they looked about them inquiringly.

But in its general features the scene presented to them nothing new.

It was not long, however, before the room got completely full, and then the chairman succeeded, after many efforts, in procuring a temporary and partial silence.

"Silence, pals," he cried. "Silence. A very important piece of information has been given to me, and I will tell you what it is."

Cries for order now arose on all sides, and when they had subsided the place became tolerably quiet.

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, "I have the pleasure to announce to you the fact that there is to-night amongst us one who is a member of our glorious profession, and the most glorious member of it, too. Gentlemen, I propose that he takes the chair on this here occasion."

"Name—name!" cried the rude assemblage. "Name—name! Who is it? Who is it?"

"Order, pals, and you shall hear. The member alluded to as being present is Dick Turpin, the hightobyman!"

The uproar that followed this announcement is far beyond all description.

"Hurrah! hurrah! Bravo for Dick Turpin! Where he is? Let him come this way! Put him in the chair! Let's drink his health! Hurrah, pals! We'll have a jolly night of it! Bravo! bravo!"

Such were a few of the more vociferous cries which could be distinguished above the Babel of other sounds.

In obedience to this call, the unanimity of which was so evident, Dick Turpin rose from where he had been sitting, and forced his way through the throng towards the chairman.

He was quickly perceived, and then seized by a dozen arms, and lifted bodily on to the table.

In this position he was a very prominent object.

His appearance was saluted with an applause that was, without exaggeration, absolutely deafening.

He bowed low and gracefully in acknowledgment.

"Take the chair! Take the chair!" was the universal cry.

The man who ordinarily fulfilled the duty of president over the rude throng had risen from his chair, and stood by the side of it, holding one of the arms.

Dick seated himself in an attitude that was at once imposing and theatrical, and fresh bursts of welcome and applause succeeded it.

The ex-chairman raised his hand, and as the eyes of all the company were turned in that direction the gesture was seen, and imagining he had something important to say, they prepared to listen to it.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "listen to me for one moment."

"Hear! hear! Silence!"

"I feel a great deal of pleasure on the present occasion in making room for one who is far worthier to sit here as chairman than I am."

"Hear! hear! That'll do! that'll do!"

But the chairman, unheeding, went on.

"I have to propose, gentlemen, that you every one fill up your glasses, and drink to the health of our honoured chairman, the celebrated Dick Turpin, the hightobyman!"

"Hurrah! Bravo!"

Dick rose.

Instantly all, as soon as they saw the movement, were silent.

He took a tolerable-sized purse from his pocket.

He held it aloft in the air, as high as the ceiling would allow him, and then let it fall upon the table.

The coins jingled musically as they descended.

"There," said Dick, "that will pay for something all round. Call the landlord, and let every one order just what they like."

The noise which had formerly prevailed was silence in comparison with the uproar that succeeded this speech and action.

Dick's popularity was in the ascendant.

It was some time before all were served.

From the elevated situation he occupied, Dick had an excellent view of the room and its inmates.

So soon, then, as he perceived that every one had his glass filled before him, he rose.

The signal was obeyed by all present, and rising to their feet, they raised the brimming glasses in the air,

while the health of Dick Turpin was drank with every possible manifestation of delight.

Then the tumult having somewhat subsided, he proceeded to respond; and, amid a perfect silence, during which the eyes and attention of all were fixed upon him, he spoke as follows—

"Gentlemen," he said, bowing, "of course you can understand how proud and pleased I am to find I stand so well as I do in your estimation, and how grateful I feel for the manner in which you have drunk my health. But, gentlemen, I came here to-night with a particular object in view, and the way in which I have been received encourages me to make known to you what it is without further preface or delay."

"Hear! hear!" interrupted a chorus of voices.

"Silence all! Let's hear what he has to say! Hurrah for Dick Turpin! Speak! speak!"

As soon as he saw a chance of making himself heard, Dick spoke, but as soon as he began there was an immediate silence.

"It must be well known to all of you," he said, "that my comrade, Tom King, has been captured, lodged in Newgate, brought to trial, and condemned to die at Tyburn on Monday morning. Gentlemen, Tom King is my friend, and, as a brave man, I honour him. It was through me that he was taken prisoner, and I have sworn to set him free. But hitherto all my endeavours have been foiled. The authorities have determined to bring him to death, and they have taken precautions such as never were taken before to prevent all possibility of escape and rescue. I engaged a clever lawyer to try to bring him off, but he failed. He still languishes in his cell, where four men keep guard over him, and watch his every movement. Gentlemen, I appeal to you, and call upon you to assist me to keep the oath I made, that I would set him free if I had to pull Newgate down stone by stone to do it."

"We will! we will! Hurrah for brave Dick Turpin and his friend, Tom King! Three cheers, mate! We'll get him out! Hurrah! down with the old prison! Let's set light to it, and burn it down! That'll be the plan! Bravo!"

Turpin began to speak, and once more all were still.

"I cannot express my joy at finding you so unanimous in your wish to aid me. Gentlemen, I beg you will think over the whole of the case, and decide in what way his escape is to be achieved. There is plenty of time for deliberation, but before we go any further I have some intelligence to communicate to you which will, I hope, afford you the greatest satisfaction. I ought to have mentioned it before, but it is not too late to repair the omission. Gentlemen, I have the pleasure to inform you that there are two other friends of mine to-night here present. They are well known to you by name, and I hope you will give them a hearty welcome. One is the celebrated world-famed Claude Duval! the other—"

But Dick's voice was drowned by the confusion which this announcement caused, and the other name could not be heard.

Claude Duval rose, and was instantly recognised by the majority of "the family," who crowded around him with every manifestation of delight.

He was lifted on to the table as Dick had been.

And then, after the ceremony of drinking his health was gone through, and he had briefly responded to it, Dick spoke.

"The other friend who is here present is Jack Rann, better known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

It was now Jack's turn to be placed upon the table, and he stood there in a confused, shrinking manner, habitual to him under such circumstances.

The delight of "the family" at having among them at one time three such very notorious characters was unbounded, and for a moment Tom King was forgotten.

But Dick took care to remind them of it.

He had anticipated a hearty welcome, but scarcely the ovation he had received.

Two chairs, in addition to the one upon which he sat, were placed upon the table, and Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack seated in them.

Then all gave themselves up to an attentive consideration of the best means to be employed to effect Tom King's release.

Many means were proposed in fact, every one has a scheme of his own.

The meeting was prolonged until a late, or rather, an early hour, and then they separated, having agreed upon the course to be pursued.

What it was it was unnecessary here to say. It will develop itself.

The three friends reached the White House again in safety, and there we will leave them while we devote some space to an account of what took place in the meanwhile at Newgate.

CHAPTER CLII.

THE HANGMAN DRIVES TOM KING TO TYBURN, AND MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

The time passed wretchedly and wearily enough to Tom King while in the condemned cell.

On the morning following the occurrences just related, old Matthew Gale paid him a visit, and communicated to him the results of the meeting with "the family" at the "Three Tuns."

This intelligence was sufficient to rekindle hope in his bosom, for, if the truth must be told, he had begun to despair.

A remarkable change took place in his manner after the interview with the worthy landlord, which the men on guard over him did not fail to notice, and were extra vigilant accordingly.

But nothing took place to reward them for their trouble.

And so the days crept on until Sunday morning came.

This was the time that Tom most dreaded, and he would have given anything to escape the ordeal of appearing in the condemned pew in the chapel, and hearing the ordinary preach the condemned sermon over him, while he would be the cynosure of a thousand unfeeling eyes."

It was a needless aggravation of the last few hours he had to spend on earth.

But, finding it inevitable, he nerved himself to bear it as well as he was able.

The gallery devoted to the reception of those whose curiosity brought them to the chapel was crowded with fashionably-dressed people, for it was only those who had the means of paying handsomely who were privileged to see the show.

Tom tried his best not to do so, but he could not help shrinking a little when he was marshalled into the chapel, and led to the seat appropriated to those in his position.

It was rather singular that during the past week he was the only one who received sentence of death. At that time, when so many crimes were visited with the extreme penalty of the law, it was very rarely that such a thing as this occurred. The criminal annals of the period show that on most hanging mornings five to seven or ten perished.

How different it is now!

Only a week or two back the writer saw in the public prints the account of the trial of a man for highway robbery. The case was fully proved, and the prisoner found guilty. In the time of which we are writing the sentence would have been death upon the scaffold; as it was, the Common Serjeant committed him for two months with hard labour.

This, we think, is going to the opposite extreme.

The punishment is manifestly inadequate.

But to return.

Tom King was, as we have said, the sole inmate of the condemned pew.

The eyes of all were therefore directed entirely upon him. There was no one near him to distract any portion of their attention.

The position he occupied was about as uncomfortable and unenviable a one as could well be imagined, so it will not be thought wonderful that his embarrassment was as great as to make him only partially conscious of what was taking place. He seemed to see all things through a dense mist; and as for the words of Mr. Colley, the ordinary, if they reached his ears, they most certainly did not penetrate to his understanding.

It is questionable whether he ever experienced so great a feeling of relief as he did when he found, by the universal movement made by all, that the service was at an end.

Assuredly, never did his cell appear so pleasant a place as it did when he was led back to it.

The remainder of the day passed like the preceding ones.

In the afternoon, however, old Matthew paid him another visit, when he again assured him that all would go well, and despite whatever precautions might be taken by the authorities, they would be of no avail, and in no way prevent his rescue, which might be looked upon as a certainty.

And then, after old Matthew had departed, the last rays of daylight faded from the dungeon, and night rapidly came on—that night which it was determined should be the last he should pass on earth.

He threw himself upon his rude, hard couch.

But he slept not.

That was out of the question.

Each hour seemed an age.

The men who were on guard over him smoked their pipes in silence, for it was only occasionally that they spoke to each other, and then only when necessary.

And so the night wore away, and morning came.

There was an unusual stir in Newgate at a very early hour.

Outside, although many hours would elapse before the procession started, a dense crowd had collected.

From the corner of the Old Bailey nearest Fleet-street, it reached to Giltspur-street, and then far away down Skinner-street and Snowhill.

Its bulk continually increased, and there was every indication that it would before long form one unbroken line to Tyburn, at which place another and as large a crowd had collected.

The news that the celebrated highwayman, whose deeds had caused so great a commotion in the land, was about to pay the full penalty of his crimes, had been diffused over the whole metropolis, then by no means the gigantic place which it is now.

The greatest excitement prevailed.

As for Tom himself, although he had every confidence in his friends, yet he could not help feeling the full peril of his situation.

As, however, the day came, he grew much calmer, and was able to, in a great measure, shake off the nervous apprehensiveness which had possession of him during the darkness; but that was only natural.

The plan, too, which had been agreed upon by his friends for his rescue, was so good a one that, provided no unforeseen accident occurred, it had every chance of success.

Under the influence of these feelings, he was able to partake heartily of the rich breakfast placed before him; for, as we have had already occasion to remark, prisoners were at that time allowed to be indulged with whatever they liked in the shape of eating and drinking, and it is a disgraceful, but well-known, fact, that many malefactors were taken to the place of execution in a state of bestial intoxication.

Tom, however, drank only sparingly of some excellent wine, for Matthew had furnished him with ample funds.

When the breakfast was over, several persons came into his cell.

One was the new deputy-governor, who had taken the utmost pains to perform all his duties with scrupulous exactness, and he used every artifice he could think of to let the civic authorities perceive it.

He was followed by the ordinary, whose behaviour was now about as unlike what it had been as it was possible for it to be.

Then came two of the sheriffs, who had the disagreeable duty to perform of accompanying the prisoner to Tyburn.

One was unknown to Tom, but the other was Mr. Bland, whose usually smiling countenance was now grave and sombre.

Some turnkeys closed the procession.

"Now, prisoner," said Mr. Cawthorn, for such was the name of the deputy-governor, "your time has come, and I hope, for all our sakes, that you will make no unnecessary bother, but submit to your fate with a good grace. Unlock the chain."

Three of the turnkeys now came forward.

Two of them took up their positions on either side of Tom and placed their hands on his collar, while the other

took a bunch of keys from his pocket, with which he undid the massive padlock which secured him by a chain to a staple firmly imbedded in the solid masonry.

Tom was perfectly well aware that he would gain nothing by any attempt at violence, so he remained quite still and tractable.

Mr. Cawthorn was vastly pleased, for, of course, he attributed this peaceful demeanour to the circumstance of the prisoner having been deeply impressed with the word he had uttered by way of caution and advice.

It was easy to be seen that the good-hearted Mr. Blandy was deeply affected by Tom's position. His behaviour on several occasions had greatly pleased him; he could see that there was about him that unmistakable impress of a gentleman which can never be assumed, and very rarely disguised, and he much regretted that one so gifted and well-educated as he appeared to be, should suffer so ignominious a doom.

Having been freed from the chain which confined him to the wall, Tom was led by his jailers into the yard of the prison, in which stood the horse and cart which was to convey him to Tyburn.

Here the smith was in waiting to knock the rivets out of his fetters, for prisoners were never taken to the scaffold in chains.

This ceremony was quickly performed. Long practice had conferred a great degree of dexterity upon him.

It would seem that the authorities had some idea a rescue would be attempted, for a large body of mounted, well-armed police-officers were in attendance, as well as a whole detachment of dragoons, who were to form a complete circle round the cart.

Tom's heart sank a little when, from a gloomy gateway, he saw these make their way into the yard.

They completely filled it.

Well he knew it would be no easy task to overcome men so well trained to the use of warlike weapons as they were.

They had, too, been evidently selected as large, powerful men, and such as would be best able to repel an assault.

A great deal of bustle and confusion took place, for many of the horses were very restive.

A coffin was placed across the front of the cart.

It was a frightfully common affair, the wood of which it was composed was deal, painted black, while it was roughly fastened together with white-headed nails, which gave it a ghastly and horrible look.

CHAPTER CLIII.

PARTICULARLY RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH TOM KING WAS TAKEN TO TYBURN.

A plainly perceptible shudder swept over Tom King from head to foot as this ominous object met his gaze.

But that was only natural.

It was a horrible idea to make a man sit down beside the coffin which was to contain in a short time his own remains.

One of the officials now tapped Tom on the shoulder, and bade him take his seat in the cart.

He obeyed.

Resistance would have been futile, and, worse than that, would have provoked ill-usage.

He was followed by the ordinary, who, on this occasion, was attired in full canonicals.

The hangman now crawled forward, and, taking the reins in his hand, sat down on the front of the cart.

And so the whole procession was formed before it began to defile through the low arched door into the Old Bailey.

By the usual time the whole of the preparations were complete.

It was no slight consolation to Tom to think that he was spared the indignities and exultation which Mr. Turner would have displayed on the occasion.

A troop of mounted police, well armed with cut-throats, headed the procession.

Then, when they were in perfect readiness to start, the gates were thrown open.

As this was done, Tom caught a transient glimpse of a countless mass of human beings, swaying to and fro like waves upon the ocean.

The duty of these police-officers was, by forming themselves into a compact body, to force a passage through the crowd.

They walked six abreast, and there was probably fifty or sixty of them.

Immediately after them came the cumbrous carriages in which the sheriffs were conveyed.

After them came another body of police-officers, but they were on foot. There was, certainly, not less than a hundred of them.

In the centre, and completely hemmed in by them, was the cart containing the hangman, the coffin, the condemned prisoner, and the ordinary.

Then an outer circle was formed by the detachment of dragoons, whose heavy horses caused the people to retreat to a respectful distance.

Tom looked upon the mass of well-armed men by which he was surrounded with something like dismay.

How could his friends hope to break through such a force, and rescue him.

The idea seemed absurd.

Truly were those in power determined that on this occasion, at least, their victim should not escape.

And thus, amid the shouts, screams, yells, groans, and hisses of the excited populace, the dismal procession started.

Tom looked eagerly around him, as soon as they turned the corner of the Old Bailey into Skinner-street.

But no faces which he could recognise met his eye.

It was, however, easy to see that the majority of the people, of whom the crowd was composed, sympathized with and were in favour of Tom King.

This was a circumstance that quickly forced itself upon the officers, though they had been previously led to anticipate that such would prove to be the case.

The appearance of Tom King alone was well calculated to enlist the good feeling of the people, and in addition to this, they had no great dislike for what he had done. They had none of them suffered any individual loss, for it was a rather notorious fact that neither he nor his comrade Turpin ever robbed those who could not afford to lose.

As it happened, none of those who had turned out to witness his execution were in that enviable predicament, nor was it likely that they ever would be.

Therefore, to them a highwayman was something more than an ordinary felon.

It is ever the case that, with the uneducated, courage is the attribute to be admired above all others, and is the one held in most esteem. We suppose it will always be so.

It was plain enough to be seen that, in the event of a rescue being attempted, they would befriend the prisoner and oppose the authorities.

This is a weakness common to all mobs.

The dense mass parted right and left before the advance of the solid body of mounted officers, who headed the procession.

As the cart reached the top of Snowhill, Tom turned a little and looked before.

Stretched up Holborn, as far as ever his eye could reach, was still the same mass of closely-packed human beings.

The shops were one and all closed, but the upper windows were crowded with eager and excited spectators, while in many places the very roof-tops were thronged.

Those persons who happened to be in Fleet-street or the Strand upon the day when the Princess Alexandra entered London, and saw the crowd that was there assembled, will be able to form a very good idea of what Holborn and the Oxford-road were like upon this eventful morning.

On reaching the foot of Holborn-hill, which then was a far more difficult ascent than it is at the present time, the cavalcade came to a halt.

The bell of St. Andrew's church was tolling dismally.

"Now," thought Tom, "will be the opportunity seized upon by my friends to achieve my rescue."

But as the three minutes, during which they stayed, passed away without the slightest manifestations being made, his heart turned cold, and a deadly sensation of sickness came over him.

The word was given, and once more the cavalcade was set in motion.

On--on they went without meeting with anything in the shape of opposition worthy of the name.

The crowd, which grew denser at every step, still shouted, groaned, and fought, as the humour took them.

Of course that wide and noble street which now connects Oxford-street with Holborn was not then in existence. It is, in fact, quite a modern improvement, having been executed within the remembrance of the majority of our readers.

Its site was then occupied by a thickly-populated district, a rookery, in fact, where crime and violence of every kind found a lurking-place.

The route to the Oxford-road then lay through the heart of St. Giles's. Indeed, that route can be taken even now.

There was a public-house in the High-street where hanging processions always halted, and where from time immemorial a bowl of wine was handed to the prisoner, who was supposed to drink the health of all the crowd.

But Tom was in no humour to comply with this custom, but still he deemed it advisable to do so, lest he should give offence to the assembled concourse.

The officers, too, and soldiers were given some refreshment, it being, in fact, a kind of half-way house.

The landlord himself came out with the huge bowl of punch in his hands, and gave it to Tom, who received it with a bow.

A loud hurrah arose from the crowd.

The guard were instantly on the alert, but there was nothing to apprehend.

Tom stood up in the cart, and, turning to the spectators, made another and a lower bow, and then drank some of the punch.

While he did so, he took the opportunity to cast an anxious glance over the crowd.

But no signs of his friends could he see.

Tom's hopes sank lower still, and when he sat down again and the procession moved on, he began in good earnest to prepare himself for death.

And yet, he asked himself, could it be possible that his friends would allow him to be taken to death without making at least an effort to save him? He thought not. They had doubtless some good reason for not making their appearance.

And thus, alternately flushed by hope and chilled with the cold breath of despair, he continued on his unwilling journey.

The broad country road, now called Oxford-street, was slowly traversed.

As they drew yet nearer and nearer to the fatal tree, so did their progress become slower and slower.

The body of police found their duty of forcing a passage increase in difficulty every moment.

But it was from no positive unwillingness on the part of those who were nearest to them that this arose.

It was because the people were already so closely packed that it was next to an impossibility to compress them into a smaller compass.

Very gradually, however, they gave way.

Then the triple-tree appeared in sight.

Tom knew it, not because he himself saw the ill-omened object, but because of the hoarse cry which arose from the people.

And still, as Tom's eyes roamed over the sea of faces, not one familiar countenance could he see.

But let it be said, that he did not perceive one that bore an expression altogether inimical to him.

But where was Dick, and Claude, and Jack? What had occurred to prevent them from carrying out their intentions as to a rescue?

Were the authorities to prevail? Was he to be a hangman's prey?

One would have thought so from a contemplation of the state of affairs.

But yet, let the chance be ever so small, his three companions were not the sort of men to give up without at least making an effort to save him.

It was in vain that Mr. Colley, the ordinary, endeavoured to arrest his attention. All that he said was wholly unheeded, for Tom understood him not.

The cart now reached the fatal spot, and here a brief pause was made while some necessary forms were subscribed to.

CHAPTER CLIV.

TOM KING IS RESCUED AT A CRITICAL MOMENT BY HIS FRIENDS.

It will be neither out of place nor uninteresting for us to take advantage of this interval in the proceedings of this terrible drama, and make the reader exactly aware of the manner in which persons were executed at Tyburn, inasmuch as the mode now adopted differs widely from it, which makes an explanation necessary for the due comprehension of the unlooked-for events which so closely followed.

The method now practised must be pretty well known.

A firm wooden stage is erected, having at its opposite sides two upright beams of wood.

Resting upon the tops of these is a horizontal beam, from the centre of which the rope is suspended.

In the middle of the platform is a trap-door, secured on the under-side by a strong steel bolt.

Upon this trap-door the prisoner stands, the cord is scientifically adjusted about his neck, the white cap drawn over his face to conceal the convulsion of the countenance. All being so far accomplished, the ceremony is terminated by the hangman making his way beneath the scaffold and withdrawing the bolt.

The instant this is done, the trap-door swings back upon its well-oiled hinges, and the body, falling with great swiftness, is stopped by a sudden jerk, which in most cases is sufficient to extinguish animation.

But in the good old times they were by no means so humane; the simple fact of the procession to Tyburn being enough to bear out that assertion. That is all done away with now. The execution takes place in front of the prison, and the needless exposure to a gaping crowd avoided.

That, however, is not all. The contrivance of a scaffold with a trap-door in it was unthought of.

The gallows at Tyburn was composed of three large beams of timber, driven equidistantly into the earth in such a manner as to form a triangle.

Across these three horizontal beams were fixed, and it was from these the rope was hung.

But there was nothing resembling a scaffold. The earth about the place was smooth and grass grown.

This is how the execution was performed.

The cart containing the condemned was driven under the beams.

Then the prisoner was made to stand up in the cart while the rope was placed about his neck.

This done, the ordinary would finish his exhortations, the white cap put on, the ordinary and hangman would leave the cart, and the latter, seizing the horse by the bridle, would strike him with a whip, and draw the cart from under the fatal beam, leaving the body swinging in the air.

This was a mode at once barbarous and inhuman.

The fall was gradual, not sudden, consequently there was no dislocation of the vertebrae, and the poor wretch died slowly, in all the convulsive agonies of strangulation.

And now, after this long description, which was, however, unavoidable, we will resume the thread of our narrative.

The cart, then, containing Tom King, was drawn under the gallows in such a manner that one of the beams was directly over it.

As the horse stopped, the crowd became profoundly silent.

Close to the gallows were the carriages in which the sheriffs had been conveyed.

In a circle round these objects, that is to say, Tyburn Tree and the carriages, were first the officers on foot.

Then those on horseback.

The outermost ring was composed of the detachment of dragon guards, who anything but liked their duty.

Mr. Colley touched Tom on the arm, and asked him to stand up.

He obeyed.

Once more, and as he almost thought for the last time, he looked up at the sky, and then at the crowd before him.

In such a dense, enormous mass, and from his position, it was next to an impossibility for him to particularize individual objects.

He could see nothing of his friends.

But if he had, he asked himself, and they had been waiting till the present moment to make their desperate attempt, what chance would they have in breaking through the triple line around him?

None, he thought.

"Is it your wish, misguided young man," said the ordinary, "is it your wish to address those who have to-day assembled in order to see you die?"

"No," replied Tom.

"Do you confess, young man? Oh! let me beseech you so to do, and ask pardon of your offended Deity for your heinous guilt."

"Peace," said Tom. "What I do I do, but never for one moment will I believe that your interposition can be of the slightest benefit to me. So you need say no more."

The ordinary made a sign to the hangman that he had finished, and he immediately proceeded to pinion Tom, as a preliminary to placing the noose around his neck.

And now it would seem that the whole of the persons there present as spectators of the fearful scene had fixed their eyes upon the chief actors in it, and allowed the whole of their attention to be absorbed.

The officers and soldiers on guard were no exceptions.

They had ceased to believe that a rescue would be attempted.

This, as will be seen, was exactly what our three friends calculated upon.

While the authorities were on their guard and on the look-out for an attack, they stood but a poor chance of achieving their design.

When, however, they were lulled into a false feeling of security, and unprepared, would be the time, since they would be taken completely by surprise.

Seizing, then, upon the moment when universal attention seemed to be riveted in one direction, the signal was given to attack the soldiers and police.

It was shortly after dusk on the preceding evening that nearly the whole of the "family" repaired to Tyburn, and took up their positions around it.

They were divided into three bodies.

One was headed by Dick Turpin.

The other two by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

For the reasons we have before given, it was at length decided that Tyburn should be the place where the rescue should be attempted, they believing that the chances there were much more in their favour.

So careful, too, were they to maintain a peaceable demeanour, that not the least suspicion was excited by their presence. At first sight they seemed mere ordinary people brought there by curiosity alone.

But their eyes were all the time fixed upon their leaders, and the moment the signal was given they were in readiness to obey it.

They drew their weapons, and made a vigorous and tremendous attack upon the guard.

It was irresistible, not only on account of their numbers, but because each man felt his heart was in his work, and the object for which they fought concerned him nearly.

Simultaneously they made their attack upon the guard.

At the same moment they cried, in stentorian tones—

"Hurrah for Tom King! Down with the sheriffs! Set him free! Set him free! A rescue! a rescue! On to them, boys! Don't flinch, and we are sure to win the day!"

But if the soldiers were for a moment taken by surprise, they quickly recovered themselves, and repelled their assailants.

And now the remainder of the mob, who were not actually of the "family," but yet who were prepossessed in favour of Tom, no sooner saw this energetic movement to overthrow the authorities, than they at once lent their aid.

In fact, it is probable they would have done this earlier, but they wanted a leader to give them the word of command.

In comparison with the number of the people, the soldiers and police were but a handful, and though well-disciplined and fully armed, they gave way before the pressure.

Foremost in the throng, and inciting the people on to the assault, were the three friends.

With desperate energy they strove to fight their way to the triple tree.

But upon the first intimation of the attack, the sheriffs had acted with the greatest presence of mind.

Even if the crowd proved the victors their determined victory should be a bootless one.

There was yet time to hang the criminal.

They might do with his dead body what they thought fit. But Turpin saw this, and so did Claude and Jack, and they determined, at all hazards, to defeat it.

Tom King was unable to help himself in the least.

He was standing up in the cart.

The fatal noose was about his neck.

The white cap drawn down over his countenance.

His arms and legs were pinioned.

He was, therefore, not in a position to so much as struggle to avert his doom.

The soldiers and police closed round the gallows, as the crowd pressed onwards; closer and closer to it they drew.

The "family" fought like demons, and with a fury that nothing could withstand.

The hangman stepped out of the cart. But as he did so, his foot slipped, and he fell to the ground.

Quickly scrambling to his feet, and uttering some most awful curses, he ran to his horse's head, and catching him by the bridle, made him start.

The cart moved.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE AUTHORITIES ARE EXASPERATED AT THE DEFEAT OF THEIR SCHEME, BUT TAKE MOST EFFECTUAL STEPS TO CAPTURE THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.—DICK TURPIN IS DULY MADE CAPTAIN OF THE BAND.

TOM KING heard the wheels revolve, and felt the cart going from under his feet.

Another moment and he would be suspended.

But that moment was not destined to arrive, for just as the hangman set the cart in motion, and before it had moved more than a few inches, Claude Duval broke through the ranks, and, with one well-directed blow, laid the hangman prostrate, and stopped the cart.

Then, with an agility which no one would have given him credit for possessing, he climbed into it.

It was just at this moment that Dick Turpin reached the other side of the cart, and, leaning forward in his saddle, he took Tom in his arms.

"Quick, Claude!" he cried. "Quick, for your life! Get on to the coffin, and cut him down! I have him safe!"

How grateful those words were to Tom King.

He had heard all the confusion that had taken place, but seen nothing.

Claude Duval lost not a second in obeying Dick's instructions, and, taking a large sharp knife from his pocket, he mounted upon the coffin, and severed the rope at a stroke.

Dick caught Tom as he fell, and, exerting his utmost strength, placed him on the saddle before him.

Then he took a hasty glance at what might, with every propriety, be called the field of battle.

The conflict continued, but its violence was much abated.

The scene was one of inextricable confusion.

By the dead weight he held he could tell that Tom had fainted.

He undid the rope that had become drawn rather tightly about his neck, and tore the cap from off his face, so that his breathing should not be obstructed.

"Get clear, if you can," shouted a voice from somewhere above, "and do so as quickly as possible. There is a reinforcement coming."

Dick Turpin raised his eyes the moment these words reached his ears, and then he saw, very much to his surprise, one of the men he had brought with him, on the horizontal beams of the gallows.

From his elevated position he was of course able to command a very extensive view.

"Get clear, Dick!" he said again, "I can see the glitter of soldiers on the Oxford-road, and there is a tremendous cloud of dust! It will take them some few minutes to get here, but you must be off before they come, or it will be all over with you."

"We must fight our way through the soldiers



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS BEARING OFF TOM KING.]

police," said Claude Duval, as he jumped off the coffin. "Once among the crowd all will be well. They will open a way for us, and cover our escape. Where is Jack?"

"Here," said a voice, and Sixteen-String Jack, looking very much the worse for the encounter, presented himself before them.

"Are you hurt?" asked Turpin, anxiously.

"Not to speak of. We have gained our purpose; the battle is won. Is Tom all right?"

"He has fainted," said Dick, "but that was from the sudden revulsion of feeling, no doubt."

"Be off with you," said the man on the top of the gallops; "be off, or you will all be captured. There is a large body of soldiers coming. In a few minutes they will be upon the spot."

"Soldiers?" repeated Jack, in accents of surprise, for he had not heard the man's former communication. "How could they have sent for and obtained a reinforcement in so short a time?"

"We must not stop to inquire," said Claude Duval. "The coast is clear now. I will get my horse."

As he spoke, Duval took from his pocket a large steel whistle, and blew upon it a blast of exceeding shrillness.

This signal was thrice repeated.

The clear, shrill sounds rose high above all the surrounding din.

Ere the last notes had become extinct, two men, mounted upon magnificent horses, rode into the little clear space that was immediately around old Tyburn-tree, for the express instructions the family had received were to keep as clear a space round it as they could, and to use their efforts to drive the soldiers and police steadily in one direction away from it.

These instructions were most admirably carried out by the family.

Claude and Jack sprang into their saddles as soon as the two men who had brought the horses had vacated them.

"We are not ~~of~~," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Captain, your orders."

"Forward, then," said Dick, "since you will have it so. You, Claude, lead the way, and Jack keep at my side."

"Right!" was the immediate reply, and Claude Duval rode a few steps in advance.

He was closely followed by Turpin and Jack Ra.

Black Bess had enjoyed a long interval of rest, and was therefore strong and able to bear, without inconvenience, a double burden.

Tom King was placed in front of Dick, and was retained in his position on the saddle by Dick's arm.

With his other hand he held the reins, so that it was necessary for some one to be at his side to defend him.

No signs of returning animation showed themselves in either Tom's face or form.

As soon as they saw the three highwaymen bearing off his body, they uttered a stentorian cheer, and, as Claude had predicted, opened a lane to allow them to pass through.

"Thanks, my friends," cried Turpin. "Many thanks for the assistance you have rendered me to-day. I shan't forget it, you may depend."

And so, with similar speeches, he greeted the people as he passed onwards.

But the lane which had been made closed up after, even as the water closes around the rudder of a ship, leaving no trace whatever of its progress.

Our friends had reached somewhere about the centre of the crowd, when a loud blast upon a bugle reached their ears.

Jack turned, and looked back.

The cavalry, of whose approach they had been fortunately apprised, had reached the outskirts of the crowd, where a scene of the utmost confusion was taking place. The bugle blast which Jack had heard was a signal for the soldiers to charge.

This was about as ill-advised a step as they could well have taken, for it brought them into immediate collision with the populace.

Their best policy would have been to conciliate them.

But the officer in command was one of those obstinate, pig-headed fellows, who always attempt to do everything by force, and so he gave the order to charge.

He had experienced a great deal of difficulty in getting so far.

Some explanation of their presence on this occasion is due, and we may as well give it here at once.

It must, then, be understood that on that very morning a communication was forwarded to the Secretary of State, whose contents were of rather a startling character.

The sum and substance of it was, that the writer had good grounds for believing that a desperate and well-organized attempt would be made to rescue Tom King upon the arrival of the procession at Tyburn, and that the attack would be headed by three daring and notorious highwaymen, to wit: Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

Now, as a general rule, the Secretary of State, as all sensible persons would, took no heed of anonymous letters, and, therefore, having perused this one, he threw it into the fire.

In spite of himself, however, its contents would obtrude upon his mind, and he felt very uncomfortable indeed.

He did not like to break through his rule, and notice an anonymous letter.

Nor did he like the idea of allowing the opportunity of capturing the three highwaymen to pass by.

So, after wasting a great deal of time in fruitless debate, he resolved to send a troop of Light Dragoons to Tyburn.

As, we have seen, this was done.

But the Secretary was so long making up his mind, that the opportunity was lost, for, instead of arriving at the time they did, they ought to have accompanied the procession.

A properly drawn-up and legal document was given to the commanding officer, empowering him to capture the three highwaymen, and lodge them in any one of his majesty's jails. "Good men and true loyal subjects

were called upon to render the soldiers all the assistance in their power, to enable them to accomplish the end desired.

Thus armed, the officer set out.

He was in a very bad temper at the duty which had been assigned to him, and so, too, were all his men, for the military never like performing the duty of peace-officers.

What little patience the hot-header officer possessed was quite exhausted with the time and trouble he had to force his passage through the mob to Tyburn.

On arriving, he saw at once that the rescue had already taken place.

Then he ordered the bugle to be blown, and gave the signal for a charge.

Thus attacked, the mob at once turned round and defended themselves, and a regular riot was the consequence.

The forms of the three highwaymen, being on horseback, were plainly visible to the officers and his men, and they endeavoured to cut a passage direct to them, through the living mass.

And however well the crowd of unarmed men stood the charge, they were compelled to give way before the sabres of the soldiers, who used them without mercy.

And so they struggled through the mob.

Yet, in spite of all their exertions, they could not gain upon their prey. In fact, the distance between them did, if anything, increase; for our friends, having reached the outskirts of the mob, were able to make better progress.

Still, their perils were very far indeed from being over.

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE TROOP OF LIGHT DRAGOONS CHASE THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ALONG THE EDGWARE-ROAD, BUT LOSE SIGHT OF THEM AT BROCKLEY HILL.

Too late the commanding officer perceived that he had made a false move, and that it would have been better not to charge the mob at all, but waited on the outside of it, and then made the attempt to capture the highwaymen.

But although he felt the full force of this conviction, he would not allow it to appear in any way whatever.

The people, however, seeing the desperate manner in which they had acted, rather shrunk from them. Still, they were only able to go at a walking pace.

In the meantime our friends had got clear of those who had been of such important assistance to them, and reached the Edgware-road.

Then the people, as soon as they saw them break into a gallop, conceived they had done enough, and no longer offered even the semblance of resistance, but opened to allow the soldiers to pass through them, even as the highwaymen had done.

But these were neither members of the family, nor were they those who had suffered from the charge of the dragoons.

Away went Claude and Jack, urging the beautiful horses which they bestrode to the utmost, but, despite of her double burden, Bonnie Black Bess kept ahead with ease.

Ere long, however, the numerous band of dragoons came thundering along the road after them.

The troop was one that had been long distinguished for the beauty and fleetness of its horses, and that was the reason it was selected, in case they should have to chase the highwaymen.

The road was broad and level. It was, moreover, firm beneath the horses' feet, and the speed they made really was amazing.

Neither of the highwaymen spoke, for conversation would have been next to an impossibility.

The whole of their attention, too, was ~~absolutely~~ in looking to the safety of their horses, for a false step or a slip would have been fatal.

Tom showed no signs of recovery, and this was a circumstance that filled Dick Turpin with uneasiness. He began to fear that the rope had already pressed with sufficient tightness round his neck to strangle him.

Or he knew that it not unfrequently happened that sudden and unexpected deliverance from any great peril resulted in death.

An instance of this was given to the writer some three years back. The narrator was an eye-witness. At the time spoken of he was a resident in Dublin, and business took him frequently to the barracks there. On one occasion a soldier was sentenced to be shot, though the offence of which he was found guilty would be deemed by most a trivial one. Some hopes that the sentence would be mitigated were entertained, but the morning for the execution arrived without bringing with it anything official. The man was led out to die.

An order was made that all civilians should be excluded from the barracks, but the narrator contrived to evade this order, and was present in the courtyard. A small body of soldiers, destined to perform the disagreeable duty of executioners, were marshalled forward, and the guns loaded. The condemned man, who was calm and composed, was led out and blindfolded. A handkerchief was placed in his hand, the letting fall of which was to signify that he was ready. An intense silence prevailed, but it was presently broken by the loud tones of an officer, who cried, "Make ready!" The rattling of muskets immediately followed. "Present!" cried the officer again. The guns were pointed at the doomed man, who at that moment let fall the handkerchief. Then followed a moment's awful stillness. The soldiers, with their fingers on the triggers of their guns, awaited the command of their officer to fire. But the word never came. The feelings of all present were wrought up to the highest pitch. None could imagine the cause of the delay, until it was announced that the condemned man was reprieved. The poor fellow rose to his feet as soon as the words reached his ears, but he almost immediately fell backwards. It was thought that he had swooned from excess of emotion, but, upon examination, it was found that he was quite dead. Joy and the sudden delivery from death had killed him.

Such is the substance of the narrative related to the writer. Some of the minor details may not be quite correct, but still the story is told as near as he remembers it. For the truth of it he cannot, of course, vouch, though, as before stated, the gentleman who related the incident stated that he was present, and well acquainted with the whole of the particulars.

Of the humanity of the military authorities nothing need be said.

Let us resume.

Turpin, then, finding the insensibility of his friend continue, was afraid that joy had killed him.

He had no opportunity, however, of ascertaining whether this was actually the case, for their pursuers were hard upon their track.

They would have, too, a very difficult job to escape, even if they were so fortunate as not to be captured, which was, of the two, by far the most probable event.

But when men feel that life and liberty depend upon their exertions, it is wonderful what deeds they can perform—such as under less dominant influences they would not dream of attempting.

The soldiers, too, were indefatigable, and tore along in pursuit of the highwaymen at a tremendous speed. They, however, were not actuated by such a powerful one, but almost. They felt they had a disagreeable duty to perform, and, therefore, the sooner they performed it the better.

Besides, the little fracas with the mob had warmed their blood, and they began to have a personal feeling in the matter, which increased every moment.

Then, again, there are few to whom hunting is not a most delightful sport, and they were huntmen in every sense of the term, only theirs was of the most exciting character, for the game they hunted was human beings.

They spared neither whip nor spur.

Still, in spite of all their exertions, they could not get on so well as they wished. Do what they would, the highwaymen maintained the same distance between them, and that distance was just out of gunshot.

They came on, too, in a straggling throng, for those who rode the fleetest horses were foremost. Had they have kept in rank, and all moved at one regular pace, they would have stood no chance whatever of capturing their prey.

When making their arrangements for Tom's rescue, our friends had not calculated upon such an energetic pursuit,

nor did they anticipate that Tom would be incapable of helping himself. In fact, a horse had been provided for him to mount upon, but which, under the circumstances, they deemed it best not to encumber themselves with.

All our readers may not be aware that the Edgware-road is a broad turnpike-road, running in a north-westerly direction from London. For exactly ten miles its course is a straight line, deviating not in the slightest perceptible degree, having not an appreciable curve during the whole of that long distance.

Many people have, no doubt, been filled with admiration when they saw it, and remarked what a beautiful road it was, but our three friends were quite of a contrary opinion, at all events, just then.

It gave them no opportunity of evading those in pursuit, for they were all the time in sight.

Had there been a bend in the road, the case would have been different. Once free from the observation of their foes, they might have a chance of finding some place of refuge.

There was no help, therefore, but to keep straight on.

The road was familiar to all three of them, and they knew that a bend in the road would not occur until they reached Brockley Hill, at which place it curves round rather suddenly to the right.

In a little more than a mile, however, it resumes its former direction, and continues in a straight line to St. Alban's.

This bend in the road, then, was the only chance they had of being out of sight of the dragoons, and it was there that they calculated upon being able to strike across the country.

Such being the case, it was obviously their best policy to strain every nerve to place as great a distance as they could between them.

At the rate they were going at, the ten miles was very soon accomplished, and the bend in the road reached.

As they swept round it—which they did with great swiftness—Sixteen-String Jack turned in his saddle, and looked back.

The foremost of the soldiers was rather more than three quarters of a mile distant.

The large or principal body about a mile off.

The cloud of dust which their horses threw up made their position apparent.

Our friends kept on for half a mile further, and then came to a halt.

Their pursuers were neither within sight or hearing.

An anxious consultation now took place as to what was best to be done; but scarcely had they commenced, than Turpin perceived Tom King evince some signs of returning consciousness.

This was an event which filled him with joy.

"You must not heed him now," said Sixteen-String Jack; "in something less than five minutes the dragoons will reach this spot. That, then, is all the time we can hope to have to reach some place of concealment, for to continue the race would be nothing but folly! What are we to do?"

"I know not what will be best," said Turpin.

"We must do something, without you intend to fall into their hands."

"This will serve us in place of nothing better," exclaimed Claude Duval. "Look here."

He pointed to a board, which was fixed on the top of some wooden palisades, on the left hand side of the road.

"What is it?"

"Draw nearer, and you will see."

"This house and grounds to let—" said Jack, reading the words upon the board. "Capital! That will do it. We shall find safe refuge there for a little while, beyond all doubt. Do you not think so, Dick?"

"Yes—yes."

"Then leap over the palings without loss of time, or the dragoons will be upon us."

Indeed, at this moment the beat of the horses' hoofs upon the hard road came quite plainly to their ears, and impressed upon them the imperative necessity there was for them to be expeditious in their movements, if they intended to elude capture.

CHAPTER CLVII.

DICK TURPIN DECIDES UPON TAKING SHELTER FOR A TIME IN MINERVA VILLA, BUT SOON FINDS IT TOO HOT TO HOLD HIM.

"KEEP still, for heaven's sake!" said Dick Turpin to Tom King, as he backed Bess to the opposite side of the road. "Keep still until we are over. It will be taxing the mare's powers to the utmost to put her to such a leap as that."

This was unquestionably true.

Very few horses could be found who would have faced such an obstacle as that palisading.

It was between four and five feet in height, and on the other side grew a quick-set hedge, which made it at least a foot higher in the lowest part, and, of course, considerably wider.

No slight achievement would it be for a horse to leap such an obstruction, and for any one to do so that carried a double burden seemed quite beyond the bounds of possibility.

But Black Bess was a creature of no ordinary stamp, as the extraordinary deeds which she performed will testify.

But, as Dick said, he was now taxing her to the utmost.

He patted her neck encouragingly, taking the reins in his teeth while he did so, and then gave her the impulse forward.

She obeyed it with the utmost willingness, and, making a tremendous rush, cleared the palings gallantly, alighting on her feet on the soft turf on the other side with a barely perceptible shock.

All who have had anything to do with horses must have noticed how great an influence example exerts upon them.

So it was with the two horses upon which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were seated.

Without the example of Black Bess before them, the probability is they would never have accomplished the leap; as it was, they performed it with apparent ease.

Claude's horse, however, missed his footing upon reaching the earth, and fell on to his knees.

He struggled to his feet again.

Then all three highwaymen dismounted.

The trampling of the dragoons sounded nearer.

The place into which they had so unceremoniously leaped appeared to be a park or shrubbery, but, whichever it might be, it was in a very neglected condition.

The ground was covered to a depth of several inches with decayed leaves, and this explained at once how it was Black Bess had descended so lightly.

Dick Turpin laid his comrade Tom upon the bed of leaves, and gave him the strictest injunctions to neither move or speak.

Then he took Bess by the bridle, and led her close to the palings.

Claude and Jack immediately followed his example.

All now awaited with extreme impatience and anxiety the approach of the dragoons.

In the positions they then occupied, it was quite impossible for anyone passing along the road to see the least vestige of them.

Nor would the hard impacted roadway receive any impressions of the horses' hoofs, to show at what part the leap was made.

The only risk they ran was that, at a critical moment, the horses might, by some slight sound or movement, betray their whereabouts.

This, however, they considered a remote contingency.

Another circumstance in their favour was that, at the time they halted, they were out of hearing of the soldiers; consequently, the officers would be out of hearing of them.

There would be no sudden cessation of the horses' foot-steps to generate the suspicion that they had sought a hiding-place on the roadside.

For all that, their position was a ticklish one. There was a chance of their being discovered, in the event of which, all resistance would be futile: captivity or death inevitable.

The clanking of the soldiers' accoutrements could now be heard, mingled with the rapid hoof-beats.

Another moment and they would reach the spot where our friends were concealed.

Placing their arms round their horses' necks, and keeping a firm hold upon their bridles with the other hand,

the three highwaymen sought, by gentle caresses, to keep the creatures quiet.

Of Black Bess Dick had little fear, but the other two were strange horses, and the worst was to be looked for. Then the soldiers swept by with undiminished speed.

It was evident they had no suspicions as yet.

The noise they made, and the cloud of dust which enveloped them, were something prodigious.

But the highwaymen did not venture to make the least movement until the last of the throng was almost out of hearing.

Then, animated by one impulse, all three directed their steps to where Tom King had been laid.

Upon their approach, however, he rose.

A glance told them that he had not only quite recovered, but that he fully comprehended their situation.

"Waste no more time with me!" he said; "You have for my sake already run too many risks. Let us proceed to action!"

"Spoken like yourself!" said Claude and Jack, both grasping him by the hands. "We have met under strange circumstances, but let us hope it will be a long period before we separate."

"Thanks!" said Tom King; "but we must defer such speeches to a better opportunity. Those who are in pursuit of us, and who, I take it, from the clatter they made, to be soldiers!"

"They are. A troop of light dragoons."

"I thought as much. They have passed us; but you cannot tell how soon they may meet some one on the road who will tell them no one answering to our description has gone by."

"We cannot," said Turpin, who was beyond measure pleased to find his comrade's mind so clear; "and in the event of such a thing, they will immediately guess we have sought shelter somewhere, and will turn back, and make a vigorous search."

"There can be no doubt of that," said Claude Duval; "so the sooner we see about making our position more secure, the better. You lead the way, Dick."

Turpin led Bess forward, taking pains to keep as much in the shelter of the trees as possible.

"What place is this?" asked Tom.

"I do not know the name of it," replied Turpin; "but while we were in the road deliberating as to what course we should pursue, Claude saw a board stuck up with words painted upon it to the effect that there was a house and grounds to let. These are the grounds, and there, look, is the house."

Dick Turpin, as he spoke, raised his arm, and pointed to a gap in the trees, through which a view of a large and substantial-looking stone mansion could be obtained.

Claude and Jack, who were in the rear, pushed forward when Turpin pointed, to see what it was.

It was the front of the house which they saw.

Before it was a very spacious lawn, skirted by a broad carriage drive.

This, however, was in many places scarcely distinguishable from the lawn. Both were completely overrun with weeds.

The house, too, had an appearance of neglect about it, or, more properly speaking, it was in that state of dilapidation into which houses so soon fall when they are left unoccupied.

With buildings the natural order of things is reversed. They wear out quickest when they are not used.

"It looks a cheerless place, does it not?" said Turpin.

"It does, indeed."

"Would it be safe, think you, to venture upon the lawn?"

"In my opinion it would be wisest not to do so. You stand a chance of being seen."

"I know that, but I was wondering which would be the best plan to adopt, to push forward and get out into some of the cross-country lanes, of which there are so many hereabouts, or to take shelter for a time within the house itself."

"That will, I expect, be rather a difficult point to settle," said Claude. "My first idea was that the place would afford us capital means of concealment."

"But yet," said Jack, "it looks to me more reasonable to endeavour to place a great as distance as we can between ourselves and the dragoons."

"So it does," said Tom, "I quite agree with Jack there."

"Then per .ps you will agree with me in this as well, that the safest road for us to take to escape the dragoons would be the road back to London, provided, of course, that we can do so without their knowledge, for if they chased us back to London we should be irrevocably lost."

"It is a bold idea," said Tom, "to think of running into the jaws of danger in that manner, and yet I should not be surprised if the daring nature of the act did not carry safety along with it."

"That is just the view I take of the case," said Jack.

"But," exclaimed Duval, "it will never do for us to remain consulting here. If we do, all the chances will be lost."

"There are three courses open," said Turpin. "One is to take refuge in the house—another to seek an entrance into some of the cross country lanes—and the other to ride back towards London. Now, which shall it be? You must decide at once!"

"We will leave it to you, Dick," was the unanimous reply. "What you think the best to do shall be done. Speak."

"I will," replied Turpin, "because I think by so doing that valuable time may be saved. The soldiers seem to have gone on, and in my opinion the safest thing we can do will be to lie snug in yonder house until a bit of the bother is blown over, and the vigilance of the authorities relaxes."

"Agreed," cried the three highwaymen. "Lead the way, Dick. We will follow."

Having thus decided, they proceeded, without further loss of time, to seek an entrance.

In order to do this, Dick, after a rapid survey of the exterior of the mansion, did not go upon the lawn, but continued to force a passage through the trees round to the back part of the house.

This they found very secluded. Indeed, there was no dread of their being overlooked from any quarter.

But the neglect which they noticed in the front, was much more apparent in the back part of the premises.

Crossing a garden, which alone was the very personification of desolation, our friends came to one of those French windows, as they are called, which reach from the ceiling to the floor, and open in the manner of folding-doors.

This they instantly fixed upon as the place where an entrance would be most easily effected, and this proved quite right, for they got the window open without a very great deal of difficulty.

"The best plan," said Turpin, "will be to bring all the horses into the house with us. They can easily come through the window, and then we know they will be quite safe."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE SOLDIERS, DIRECTED BY MR. GROVES, APPROACH THE EMPTY VILLA AND SURROUND IT, WHICH FILLS OUR HIGHWAYMEN WITH CONSTERNATION.

WHETHER or not the empty house would prove a safe place of refuge depended entirely upon one condition.

That condition was an obvious one.

It was that the officers should not learn in any way that they had taken shelter there. If they did, their predicament would be an awkward one indeed, for to be besieged in a place of that sort by so many well-armed men would be no joke.

But what Turpin thought was, there was no mode that he could think of by which the soldiers could be made aware that they had taken shelter there at all, and consequently that being a never-visited place they would be safer there than they could possibly be elsewhere.

Passing through the room into which they had come by means of the French window, they emerged into a hall of very tolerable dimensions.

This was the lightest place in the house, for in the rooms the shutters had been closed, so that, except where a few rays of daylight made their way through the chinks, they were in utter darkness.

But in the hall there was a very good supply of light. It came in through a fan-light over the door, and also

through a large and beautiful stained-glass landing, which could be seen just at the bend in the stairs.

They had no trouble in tying the horses to the balusters, and then they felt themselves quite free to go where they chose.

"Let us ascend," said Dick; "not only shall we be in lighter rooms, but also from our elevation able to command a view of the surrounding country, which may prove an advantage to us."

"Most decidedly," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I only hope they don't come here to look for us, for as sure as they do we shall be in a fix."

"I do not anticipate such a thing, myself, even for a moment, though there is no harm in being prepared."

"None at all, and now that brings me round to the subject I spoke of once before. Tom, my boy, I want you to give me your attention for half a minute."

"What is it, Claude?"

"I will tell you in a very few words. The other day, while we were all three talking about your escape, Jack and myself came to the determination to form ourselves into a band of four, as soon as you were free, and place ourselves under the command of Dick, who should be our leader, or captain, or whatever you like to call him. All we want is for you to consent to the proposal."

"Then you have it, and, if you will believe me, I never said yes to anything more willingly in my life. It is the best plan of action that could possibly be adopted."

"Hurrah!" said Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, in the same breath. "Hurrah! I thought you would agree to it."

"I do. Together, I believe we may do much, and be safe, but separated we could do nothing, and should, in a short time, take a ride to Tyburn, as I did to-day. Indeed my own case is about as good an instance of what I say as could very well be found. Had I been alone I should have perished, but through having you for my allies, I have been saved, and, to the end of my life, I shall always feel grateful to all three of you for what you have in done in my behalf."

"Come on," said Dick, "we have only done by you what you would have done by us; I am impatient to see the upper part of the house."

"Lead the way, then, and we will quickly follow you," answered Sixteen-String Jack; "I am quite as impatient as you are."

Turpin sprang up the stairs, with his comrades at his heels.

Upon reaching the landing they saw before them a number of doors.

Dick chose one which he imagined, from its position, would have its window situated in front of the house.

"Hold back," he said, "we must not show ourselves, for, as you know, this is a safe place for us only so long as no one suspects us to be in it."

It was well indeed for all that Turpin had the presence of mind to check, on the part of his companions, the very natural impulse which they felt to go direct to the casement and look out.

All four crossed the room cautiously, and then crawling to the window, peeped out of it.

It was next to an impossibility for them to have been seen by any one outside, for they only raised the upper part of their heads above the sill.

The first thing that attracted their notice was the entrance gate leading into the grounds surrounding the house.

It was some distance from it, and opened into the Edgware-road.

Before they had time to see anything more, Jack uttered an exclamation.

"Done!" he said. "We have brought our pigs to a nice market. Look, here come the dragoons back again."

The other three saw them before Jack finished speaking, for they followed the direction of his eyes.

About a quarter of a mile off down the road, and coming at a walk, was the troop of soldiers who had been so specially sent out by the Secretary of State to capture them.

They were looking about from side to side with great eagerness, as though each moment they expected to catch sight of something for which they were on the look out.

Turpin drew a long breath.

"It's all right," he said. "I expected they would come back, seeing and hearing nothing of us in advance. They must have been right on to St. Alban's."

"They needn't know we are here," said Claude; "and I don't think there is anything that would serve to put them on the scent. I wish night would come."

"Your wish will soon be gratified, then. The sun must be about setting, by the colour of his beams."

"Under cover of the night we should be able to steal away from here first-rate, and betake ourselves to a place of greater safety."

"Good heavens," exclaimed Jack Rann, whose eyes had never been off the soldiers for a moment. "Good heavens, they have already discovered us! They are pointing to the house!"

A glance confirmed this startling intelligence. At the short distance from the house which the dragoons were, it was easy enough to see that they were all attentively regarding the empty house.

But whether this had any connexion with our friends was more than they could say.

It would, however, he quickly seen.

Our readers can one and all imagine with what intense eagerness the highwaymen watched the progress of the soldiers along the road.

All depended whether they made a halt before the entrance-gates. If they did, all would be over with them.

Nearer and nearer they came, and at the same gentle speed.

Had they given up the hope of capturing them?

It looked like it.

And now, when the foremost in the troop were within about a dozen yards of the gates, the eager anxiety of our friends increased to an intolerable extent.

Their doubts and fears were quickly set at rest.

The troop stopped before the gates.

And now the interest they felt in what was going to happen next absorbed the whole of their faculties. They could neither move nor speak.

That the empty house was their destination was evident enough, for gradually the whole troop formed in a dense cluster round the entrance-gates, which were at length, after a good deal of trouble, thrown open.

Then they filed in, making in a direct line for the front door of the house, without paying the least regard to the path.

To reach the lawn took them but a few moments.

Then, as they came more fully to view, they noticed something which had until then escaped their observation.

And that was that the soldiers were accompanied with a stout bulldog-looking man, who was attired as a country farmer.

This man evidently was on rather friendly terms with the officer, for he walked near the neck of his horse in an important and imposing way.

It so happened that several of the panes of glass in the window out of which the highwaymen were looking had been broken out—indeed, demolished is the more appropriate word.

This happened luckily, for it enabled our friends to hear with tolerable ease what was being said outside.

They listened, stretching their ears to the utmost. A few words would decide them how to act.

The commanding officer was speaking.

"And so, Mr. Groves, this is Minerva Villa, is it?"

"It is, sir."

"And you think most likely the gentlemen we seek have taken shelter there?"

"I do."

"Then, if I speak the truth, I must say I don't."

"You're wrong."

"Not so! You do not know our men. They have cleverly enough managed to give us the double, and, by this time, are many a mile off. You may make your mind easy about that; though, of course, I shall search the villa just for the sake of feeling satisfied."

"Do so! and you will be rewarded."

"What makes you so positive, Mr. Groves?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. Some fifteen years ago, Jonathan Wild was pursued by the police along this road, when all of a sudden he disappeared: and where do you think he went to?"

"That is more than I can tell—without this house was empty then, as it is now, and that he took shelter in it."

"Such is precisely the state of the case! The house was empty, and he did take refuge in it."

"The devil he did?"

"Yes; and what is more, he was caught: and now you know what makes me think they are hidden there, because they appear to have disappeared about the same spot; and they are quite as likely to think it a likely place of concealment as Jonathan Wild."

"To be sure! I am much obliged to you, Mr. Groves, and we will soon set the matter at rest."

By the time this little dialogue was at an end—every word of which had reached the highwaymen's ears—the whole of the soldiers had reached the lawn, for several of the horses having fallen lame, they came in stragglers.

Turning round, and seeing all there, he, in quick military tones, gave them the order to dismount, and form themselves into a circle round the building.

This manoeuvre was quickly executed.

Some of the men proceeded to picket the horses.

The commanding officer and Mr. Groves walked about together.

As soon as the men had formed themselves into a circle round the villa, he turned to his companion, as he said—

"There; if they are in the house I shall very soon have them. I hope and trust they are there, and then this disagreeable duty, which I feel it a disgrace to be set to perform, will be over."

CHAPTER CLIX.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH MINERVA VILLA WAS ATTACKED BY THE DRAGOONS, AND THEN BURNED TO THE GROUND.

To say that the four highwaymen viewed these energetic proceedings with something akin to dismay, would be to tell no more than the truth.

What hope could they have to cope with so many, with the least chance of success?

None at all.

They looked upon their capture or death as certain, and so resigned themselves to either the one or the other.

The place itself was in the worst possible conceivable state for them to stand a siege.

They had found no difficulty in making an entrance, nor was it likely the soldiers would.

They were at their wits end.

Dick Turpin was vexed, and took all the blame upon himself for what had occurred, though, of course, he had acted, as he thought, for the best. Too late he saw that the plan proposed by Sixteen-String Jack would have been the best one to follow.

Such regrets as these were now worse than useless; still he could not help cursing the officious Mr. Groves from the bottom of his heart, for it was clear enough, had it not been for him, they would not have been molested.

Dick resolved to pay him out, if ever he was blessed with an opportunity.

What is the best thing to be done? was the question uppermost in the minds of all of them.

But they could think of nothing.

Their reflections were disturbed by three terrific bangs upon the knocker of the front door.

Then a voice called upon those within to open in the king's name, and to fail not at their peril.

Of course, no notice whatever was taken of this appeal.

It was thrice repeated.

They were now permitted by the law to break into the house.

"I can see but one plan that offers us the least chance of success, and that chance is so very remote, that we might almost as well stay where we are and be captured!" Let us hear it, nevertheless," cried Claude.

"It is this. Let us mount our horses, and then taking advantage of a time when the attention of all is occupied, let us make a sudden dash out—cut our way through the soldiers—and then fly for our lives!"

Claude shook his head.

"It is a desperate plan," he replied, "and, from the very boldness of it, deserves success. One thing would be greatly in our favour."

"The soldiers are not mounted, and if we succeeded in getting through their ranks we should have the start of

them, for it would take them some little time to get into their saddles."

"So it would—so it would. I did not think of that."

"Moreover, night is coming on apace."

"Another very favourable occurrence. I am beginning to get a better heart."

"I have an amendment to propose," said Tom King, "and one to which I have no doubt you will agree."

"Quick, then. Speak it!"

"Let us barricade the place below as well as we are able, so as to keep them for a short time at bay."

"Well, what then?"

"In the meantime let us set fire to the house in as many places as we can."

"Set fire to the house?"

"Yes, why not?"

"What is the good?"

"Cannot you see?"

"No, that I am sure we cannot."

"I am surprised. When the house is fairly alight we will mount, as Dick said, and wait as long as we possibly can."

"Yes—yes!"

"And then, when the flames are at their height, and when they are least in anticipation of such a thing, we will fling the door open, and make a rush for our lives in the way Dick proposed."

"That is an amendment, with a vengeance!" said Sixteen-String Jack, "but yet I like the plan. If you can manage to carry it out, you will have a much better chance of making your escape."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"And you, Claude?"

"Yes, if the barricading can be done, and the soldiers kept out long enough."

"That I own is the worst part of it. But still, are you willing to make the attempt?"

"Perfectly, since it cannot, by any possibility, make our condition worse than it is, while there is just a faint hope of making it better."

"Exactly; and you, Dick?"

"I consent, of course, and let us carry it out at once. Who has the means of setting light to the place?"

"I have," said Jack.

"Then do you perform that part of the business, while we three will do our best at barricading the doors and windows. You had better begin to set light to the top of the house."

"All right. You perform your part of the business, and I will perform mine."

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack darted up the stairs, and, with great rapidity, made his way to the top of the house.

The top floor consisted of two large attics, which had clearly been, at some former time, used as lumber rooms, for a considerable quantity of rubbish yet remained on the floor.

This was just what he wanted, so, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, he disposed it to the best advantage; then took out his phosphorous bottle and matches.

By the aid of these the paper was soon set fire to, and he had the satisfaction of seeing it blaze up bravely.

Then he turned to the front room, and went through a similar performance.

This done, he returned to the other room, and found there was quite a fierce fire burning, so he scattered the fragments about in such places where they would most readily take hold of the woodwork.

Only those who have seen a fire break out, can form a correct estimate of the speed with which the flames spread. When seen it almost seems incredible.

With such pains as Jack took, the upper part of the house was quickly in flames.

Then he descended to the next floor.

Here the materials were not so plentiful, but the walls were all lined with wood, so he tore down one or two of the panels and lighted them, placing them afterwards in such a manner as to easily catch the remnant.

And so on he performed his task, and without being long about it, too, and when he descended into the hall, were the others were, the upper part of the mansion was roaring like a furnace.

And now we must go back and relate what happened to the other three.

As Sixteen-String Jack dashed up the stairs, they ran down them into the hall.

Just when they reached it, the soldiers commenced a violent attack upon the front door.

They were not used to their work, or they would have looked for a place where a breach could have been more easily effected.

They did not, however, calculate that the door would prove much of an obstacle, nor would it have done so, had not our friends fitted a couple of stout bars into their staples, and then piled against the wood-work all the heavy articles they could find.

Then they took a hasty survey of the proceedings of the besiegers outside, but they did not seem to be making an attack at any other point.

In fact, what the officer intended to do was to keep his men well surrounding the building, and then to batter down the door, and enter with a good body, and take the inmates prisoners; or, if they attempted to fly, they would only fall into the hands of those stationed outside.

So far all was good, but the plan which the highway-men had hit upon was just calculated to upset it.

Finding the barricading done, Dick Turpin produced a tinder-box, and so did Claude, and the pair, in a few moments, set fire to the ground floor in more than fifty places.

The fire caught surprisingly, but the house was old, and full of dry wood-work.

It blazed bonnily.

When they perceived the fire from the outside, it had obtained a firm hold of every part of the house.

The violence of their blows redoubled.

When Jack, therefore, descended the stairs, he found the lower part enveloped in flames.

The horses got frightened and restive.

As a last stroke, they set fire to the barricade, which they had erected against the front door.

The heavy, cumbersome articles, of which it was composed, were as dry as tinder.

The soldiers continued their attack with increased fury, and presently a crackling sound announced that the door was giving way.

When they saw this was the case, the highwaymen led the horses into the room which they had entered.

This one they had been careful not to set fire to.

Nevertheless, the woodwork was burning in many places, and the apartment was filled with pungent, suffocating smoke.

This being the case, Jack ran no risk by going to the window and opening the shutters.

It became evident, then, immediately, that the flames and the smoke were driven from the front to the back of the house.

Outside the window, when the shutter was thrown back, our friends could see nothing but a dense mass of black smoke.

But how far it extended, or whether it merely hung there as a curtain, was more than they could tell.

They trusted, however, to its being the former.

They mounted.

But the moment they seated themselves in the saddles, a terrific crash announced the demolition of the front door.

But when they beat it down, such a furious body of flame and smoke rushed forth, that they were, one and all, compelled to retreat.

From every window, too, and from the roof as well, the flames and smoke came pouring forth, and it was clear that in a few minutes very little would be left of Minerva Villa but a heap of blazing ruins.

The officer in command hardly knew what to make of the affair.

All he could do, however, was to order his men to be extra vigilant, and fire upon any one they saw attempt to make their escape under the cover of the smoke.

A minute elapsed, during which the smoke grew thicker and thicker.

Then the loud report of a volley of fire-arms was heard, and at the same moment the roof of the old villa fell with a tremendous crash, burying all beneath it.

CHAPTER CLX.

OUR FRIENDS GET CLEAR FROM THE BURNING VILLA,
BUT BY NO MEANS OUT OF DANGER.

A COLUMN of white dust shot up high into the night sky as the roof fell.

In its downward course it caused the walls to collapse, and all fell together to the ground in one immense smoking, smouldering heap, which was all that remained of Minerva Villa.

We now return to the proceedings of the highwaymen, whom we left as they seated themselves in their saddles.

The smoke, hanging as it did in a dense mass in front of the window, favoured them greatly in what they had to do.

If this had not been the case, they could not have made the charge in a body as they intended, and therefore they would have stood a much fainter chance of achieving their purpose.

Tom King, the reader will remember, had no horse, so Dick insisted upon his mounting behind him.

The horses now began to show signs of distress, so they guided them as silently as they could through the window.

The sagacious creatures seemed to recollect having entered it, and also to be aware that silence was desirable, and they put their feet to the ground with the greatest stealthiness.

The smoke completely hid them when they emerged.

All three of the horses were now made to stand close to each other.

Now they made the charge, they listened in the hope that, by so doing, they might make themselves acquainted with the position of their foes.

They also strove to recollect what they should have to encounter in the shape of obstacles.

But in both instances the effort was a vain one; they could neither form any definite idea of the position which the soldiers occupied, nor could they distinctly call to mind, having only once seen it, the general aspect of the garden.

Their charge, therefore, would be obliged to be made headlong, and at random.

Providence must be trusted for the result.

And now, to look at the general aspect of affairs, there really did seem to be a probability that the highwaymen would escape unscathed from one of the most perilous straits in which it had ever been their lot to be placed.

There is no doubt, however, but that for Tom's lucky thought about setting fire to the house, they would at that moment have been in a far less enviable position.

Yet they were far—very far from being safe. The rank of the dragons would have to be broken through. They would have to run the risk of the shots that would be fired at them.

The smoke which had so far been such a friend to them was now a foe.

It was just at this minute, and when they had determined upon the charge, that the roof of the villa fell in, as related at the end of the last chapter.

The crashing sound frightened the horses, and made them increase their speed.

Then, dimly and faintly through the smoke, they saw a flash of fire, and heard the loud report of the guns.

The soldiers who discharged them had not, of course, caught sight of the fugitives, for that was simply impossible, but they had heard the tramp of the horses' hoofs, and they aimed their pieces in the direction of the sound.

Instantly all were on the alert, and prepared to withstand a charge.

But the highwaymen were upon them before they were aware of it.

So impetuous was the charge, that the soldiers, who were only a single line on foot, gave way.

"The prisoners have escaped!" they cried, as loud as they could bawl. "This way! this way! An escape! Bring the horses round! Mount, and ride in pursuit! *Yick!* or you will be too late! Fly! There they go! Over the fence! They're off, by Jove!"

These were a few of the ejaculations that came from the lips of those who had witnessed the highwaymen's daring charge and flight.

One half-second after the encounter with the dragons, and they were clear of the bewildering smoke.

And just in time it was, too, or a most serious accident would have occurred, which would have possibly resulted in their capture.

Just before them was a rather high wooden fence.

They saw it, and the horses saw it only just in time.

The obstacle in itself was nothing, and they went over it without the least trouble.

Beyond this was a paddock, and then a meadow; afterwards a hedgerow, and then they emerged into a narrow, winding country lane.

They turned their horses heads towards London.

Black Bess carried her double burden bravely, though nothing but the most urgent necessity would have tempted Dick to place her powers to so severe a test.

The sounds of pursuit reached them.

The dragons themselves began to feel quite a personal interest in the affair, and they all acted as though it was of the utmost importance to themselves to succeed with the design they had in hand.

Therefore they ran to the lane where the horses had been picketed, and scrambling into their saddles, set off at a helter skelter pace, without thinking of, or waiting for, the word of command.

But in spite of all they could do, the highwaymen had got a good start, and in a long chase a start is everything.

The road they had now chosen was very unlike the Edgware-road. Not only was it tortuous, but miry, and very heavy and tiring for the horses.

They resolved to leave it at the first opportunity.

The pursuing dragons used whip and spur unmercifully, and goaded on their poor and jaded animals at a furious rate.

This persistence in keeping upon their track made all four of the highwaymen uneasy. It showed how determined was the effort made to hunt them down.

And when we take a careful and comprehensive view of the whole matter, we shall not fail to see that they had ample room for apprehensive dread, and that they might dread the worst.

If they survived this attempt at annihilation, they thought they could bid defiance to all others which might afterwards be attempted.

This was such a systematic and well-organized pursuit, that its termination appeared to point to running the highwaymen to earth.

Tom King, having no horse, was quickly felt to be a very serious inconvenience, inasmuch as it prevented Black Bess making full use of her powers, and, besides, fatigued her in no ordinary degree.

She had now been on the road for a long time, and had received neither rest nor refreshment, except such as she received for the few minutes she was in the hall of the empty mansion.

But there was one thing that was very much in their favour, and that was darkness.

This increased every moment as night deepened, and as the clouds piled themselves up in the sky, shutting out all glimmers of the blue vault.

A blustering wind, too, came every now and then in violent gusts from the south-west, and there was every indication of coming rain.

This the highwaymen did not care for, so that the roads were not made too heavy by it.

In spite, however, of their utmost efforts, they were a long time before they could get out of earshot of their pursuers, who came thundering on with untiring perseverance, but at last they began to grow fainter and fainter.

The imperative necessity of adopting some strategic measure now pressed itself upon the minds of all four of the highwaymen. To continue their flight under existing circumstances would be nothing short of utter madness.

Presently they came to a place where the river Brent crossed the lane. It was spanned by a huge wooden structure, for it so happened that just there the mimic river was of more than its ordinary width.

The horses' hoofs raised many a strange echo as they clattered over the bridge, but scarcely had they reached the opposite side than Claude Duval cried out, in a loud voice, "Halt!" at the same time arresting the progress of his own steed.



[DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, DUVAL, AND JACK ROBBING THE OXFORD COACH.]

The command was immediately obeyed by his two comrades, who were filled with surprise, in which alarm was also mingled, for they dreaded that some accident had befallen him.

The next words, though, that he uttered dispelled their fears, and infused a momentary gleam of hope that they would yet succeed in baffling their enemies.

"Halt!" Claude cried; "I have an idea which I think can be successfully carried out. The river here appears to be both broad and deep. What is to prevent us from walking our horses into it, and then swimming down the stream."

"Nothing," said Dick Turpin. "It is a good thought, but it must be acted upon at once, or we shall be either seen or heard by our foes. Into the stream at once."

"We cannot make our position worse, be it how it may," said Sixteen-String Jack, as he followed Claude down the rather precipitous bank of the river, and then fairly walked his horse into the stream.

"It will be a rest for our steeds. Slip off the saddles

and hold on by the bridles. If they are not encumbered with a rider's weight, the cold water will fit them with new life."

Before Dick Turpin had finished this speech, all had taken to the water and were ready for a start; nor were they any too soon, for the approach of the Light Dragoons was now plainly distinguishable.

To their unspeakable relief, they found the river, near the centre, was quite deep enough to allow the horses to swim down it with ease, and not only that, there was a strong current tending in a southerly direction.

Certainly it was rather a strange mode of regression, but though it was slow it was silent, and they built their hopes on the supposition that the route they had taken would be unsuspected, and their pursuers accordingly thrown completely off the scent—for a time, at any rate.

In accordance with Dick's commands, as soon as the horses found themselves out of their depths, all four slipped from their saddles, and committed themselves to the water.

Having a firm grasp upon the reins, they found a small amount of exertion sufficient to keep them afloat. The horses seemed to be much refreshed by their immersion, and they struck out more vigorously every moment.

But though their course seemed slow, it was not so actually. Progress in water is always deceptive, and, as they had the current in their favour, they drifted onwards almost without being aware of it.

CHAPTER CLXI.

FOR A SHORT TIME OUR FRIENDS SUCCEEDED IN ELUDING THE DRAGOONS.

FROM time to time they cast anxious glances behind them, in anticipation of seeing something of the troop of dragoons.

But the outlines of the bridge became confused, and at last faded altogether from their sight.

This happened before they heard the dragoons arrive. Still they thought it not exactly prudent to leave the river yet, for fear they should not be far enough off to prevent the sound of their horses' hoofs being heard.

The river wound about very much, and they were not able in the darkness to take notice sufficient for them to tell how much they had doubled on their course.

There was the danger that it might wind them round again to the high road which they had left, but upon Turpin being applied to for information upon the subject, he replied that there was no danger of any such thing.

"I know the course of the little river well," he said. "If we continue to follow it we shall come out upon the Uxbridge Road at a point called Stonebridge, about half-way between Wilsdon and Twyford. Do you see the place?"

"Quite well," replied his comrades.

"That is enough, then. When we get there it will be time enough for us to consider which will be the next thing we had better do."

"You are right," said Tom King, "and one of the first things necessary will be to provide me with a horse. Black Bees won't be able to carry your weight and mine."

"That is true, and it is a shame to tax the poor animal so. Nothing but dire necessity would have induced me. But never mind, she has not sustained much damage yet."

The river, after a little while, grew shallow again, which caused them to make another change.

They resolved, however, not to leave the course of the river, but walk their horses along the banks.

This time Claude Duval would insist upon Tom King riding behind him.

Without meeting with any adventure worthy of narration, they reached the stone bridge which spanned the river, and were glad to get up upon the broad highway.

From having been so long in the water, their clothing had got completely soaked through, and it now hung about them in a most disagreeable and uncomfortable manner.

To a spectator, at any rate, they would have appeared but very sorry objects.

The chill night air struck through to their very bones, and made their teeth chatter like castanets.

They clustered together, and a rather anxious consultation took place as to what step was to be taken next.

No sounds indicative of the vicinity of their pursuers reached their ears. They felt pretty certain, in fact, that they had completely succeeded in throwing them off their track.

Such being the case, the comforts which would accrue from a pleasant fire and a glass of something hot and strong, came vividly across their imaginations.

But their appearance, all dragged with mud and water as they were, was quite sufficient to rouse suspicion.

"Our position won't be improved by waiting," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and so the sooner we make up our minds what we are going to do the better."

"So say I," said Claude; "I am about as uncomfortable as a human being well could be."

"I only know of one thing that we can do," said Turpin, "and that is running rather more risk than I think advisable."

"Let us hear it."

"I am your captain, you say?"

Exactly."

"Then you are under my commands?"

"I suppose we ought to consider ourselves so."

"Then I will tell you what I had thought of, and what to me seems about the only course left open to us,"

"Well?"

"You can decline if you like. About a mile further on from here is a public-house known as the 'Fox and Grapes,' kept by a man named Pilbeam."

"I just know the house," said Tom King, "and that is about all."

"I know the landlord, and the landlord knows me," continued Turpin; "I have stayed at his house when I have been hard pressed by the runners."

"And he never betrayed you?"

"No; and yet there is something about the man's face and manner which makes me mistrust him."

"Perhaps that is your fancy."

"It may be."

"Why did he not betray you before?"

"It may not have been worth while to do so, and, more than that, at the time I speak of, I had not done anything particularly notorious."

"I see."

"But now you may depend there will be a great outcry made against us. The fact of a troop of dragoons having been despatched purposely to effect our capture will bear out that assertion. A large reward will be offered for the four of us; enough, in fact, to tempt any man."

"You are right; it will be running a great risk."

"Precisely; and yet, after all, he may be well disposed towards us, and have no thoughts of acting treacherously."

"You are willing, then, that we should try our luck?"

"I am; good fortune has always hitherto invariably attended us, and I do not see why she should desert us now. The thing is, the house is not far from London, and they may have heard of what has taken place at Tyburn to-day."

"Most likely, I should say."

"Still, if you are willing, I think we cannot do better than take shelter there for an hour or two at least—not solely on account of ourselves, but our cattle."

"And it must not be forgotten," said Claude Duval, "that we are now four strong, and that it would be no ordinary foe that we should have to dread."

"True; when we look more closely at it, the danger is not so great, only it would be awkward if the dragoons chased us here."

"It would, and no mistake; but I do not think we need be afraid."

"But, come, are you ready, all?"

"All!"

"Forward, then!" exclaimed Dick Turpin; "it is the first house you will come to on the left-hand side of the way."

Once more putting their steeds to rapid motion, they sped along the road.

The "Fox and Grapes" was very quickly in sight.

As soon as it was they drew rein a little.

To have made too much clatter would not have served their purpose at all.

Lights were beaming from nearly all the windows on the ground floor of the inn, thus showing that its inhabitants had not yet thought of retiring to rest.

There was an opening at the side of the public-house leading to the stables, and down this they turned.

The hoofs of the horses made a slight sound, and it appeared to be heard by the individual who performed the duties of ostler, for there came from the further end of the yard a flash of light, as though some one was carrying a lantern.

Our four friends dismounted, and then, taking the horses by the bridle, advanced to meet the man carrying the light.

Upon approaching him they found him to be a youth of about twenty years of age, with dark, curling hair, and a good-humoured expression of countenance.

"Well, Joe," said Turpin, with the air of an old acquaintance; "well, Joe, do you recollect me?"

Joe turned the lantern so that its principal beams should fall upon Dick's countenance.

"I thought it was your voice," he said. "Why, you are the noble gent that gave me a guinea the last time you were here, for grooming that black mare of yours."

"Just so. These are friends of mine, and they as well as myself, want their steeds well taken care of."

"I'll do it, sir. I'll do it."

"I knew you would: and now, Joe, do you know who I am?"

"I think I do."

"How did you come to know?"

"The guard of the coach told me."

"Ah!"

"Yes, but don't be afraid of trusting me. I'll never betray you as long as the world stands!"

"I will trust you, Joe, and if you will believe me, so far as your own money interest goes, you will get more by befriending me than ever you will by giving me up to justice."

"I wouldn't do no such thing! No, not was it ever so!" said Joe, with great emphasis. "Let me have the cattle, and I'll take care they are all right. You say those with you are friends of yours?"

"Yes."

"May be some of them that helped you at Tyburn this morn'g?"

"Ah! How did you learn anything about that?"

"Why, Lor bless you, I was there myself, and didn't I say into the officers downright well."

"I am much obliged to you, and here's some one who will feel even more so than I do."

"Then that's Tom King?"

"It is; but you ought to know it is not at all prudent for you to mention his name in that sort of way. You don't know who might be listening."

"Mum's the word with me in future."

"Will it be safe for us to enter the house?"

"Well, I don't know. You see it might be and it might not."

"I suppose so," said Dick, with a slight smile.

"Has any one belonging to the place seen you come in?"

"No one but myself, I think."

"Very good; then if you will be content to come up into the loft with me, and make yourselves as comfortable a bed as you can amongst the hay, I think it will be the best thing for you."

"Can you conceal us, there?"

"Without any trouble, if no one has seen or heard you arrive besides myself."

"I am much obliged to you for your offer," said Turpin. "You won't lose anything by it. I will consult with my friends a moment."

"All right. You'd better come inside the stable, and then you won't be so likely to be seen. Come up."

Joe, the ostler, led the horses into the stable, and was followed by the four highwaymen.

Then pulling the door shut, Joe hung the lantern on a hook in such a way that its light was pretty equally diffused over the stable, and our friends drawing close together, considered over the proposal the ostler had made to them.

In the end, after arguing the matter pro and con for some time, they determined to accept his offer, and followed him up into a spacious hayloft, which extended over the whole range of stabling.

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE TROOP OF DRAGOONS STILL FOLLOW IN THE TRACK OF THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN.

The fresh hay with which the loft was literally crammed sent out an odour peculiarly grateful and pleasing to the senses.

At least, it was so to our friends.

They were really surprised to find what a comfortable bed the ostler managed to make for them.

Then, when they laid down, he covered them carefully with it.

Pain would they have taken off their wet clothes and dried them, but that was not to be thought of, and they found the dry hay quickly absorbed the moisture from them.

All four were dreadfully fatigued, and very badly in want of rest.

"Are you all right, gentlemen?" asked Joe.

"Yes; and could sleep, if you would only keep guard over us, and warn us of the approach of any danger."

"Sleep, then, for rest assured I will do so."

"Many thanks."

"Do not think," said Claude Duval, "that we shall allow the great service to go unrewarded."

"Well, I won't say I shall be angry with you if you offer me something for my trouble."

"That's right. We shall look upon it as work done, and pay for it accordingly."

"Good night, then, gentlemen. Sleep in security, for upon the least sign of anything going amiss, you may depend I shall wake you."

"We can depend upon that?"

"You can."

Joe, the ostler, descended from the hayloft into the stable, where he proceeded to give his every attention to the horses, for the state they were in required it.

But he was well master of his business, and in a very short space of time indeed he had thoroughly cleansed and fed them.

Continually looking danger in the face as they did, made the highwaymen indifferent to it in a very great degree, and though they were on this occasion surrounded, as one might say, by an atmosphere of danger, and with their liberty depending solely upon the fidelity of a man they scarcely knew, but who had professed good faith towards them, they allowed themselves to sink into a profound slumber.

It was placing a great temptation in the ostler's way. The aggregate rewards that were offered for the apprehension of the four would amount to a considerable sum, and be enough almost to tempt any one when they found it all but within their grasp.

We should not be doing that strict justice which it is always our wish to do if we said that some thoughts of the wealth he would obtain by acting treacherously did not flit across Joe's mind: and when the operation of grooming the steeds was over, he sat down upon the lid of the corn-bin, and putting his head between his hands, gave himself up to thought.

A severe struggle took place in his breast.

By giving up the highwaymen to justice, he would be merely doing his duty to society, and at the same time he would be placing in his hands what to him would be competency for the remainder of his life.

More than once he started to his feet, walked to the stable door, having all but determined to deliver them to their foes.

But as often he returned, and resumed his seat.

And so the night wore on.

Little did the slumbering highwaymen think that they were in such peril as they were. Peacefully, quietly, and deeply they slept.

But Sixteen-String Jack, who was lying nearest to the circular window in the loft, suddenly grew restless.

He rolled over and over, and tossed his arms up and down.

The rustling sound which the hay made as he displaced it tended still further to disturb him.

Presently he awoke.

Accustomed as he was to waking up and finding himself in strange places, for he very rarely was twice at the same place—accustomed as he was, we say, this time he felt baffled and confused.

But the feeling lasted only for a moment.

Quickly shaking it off, he rose to a sitting posture, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which surrounded him.

In this attempt he was unsuccessful, but he could tell by the deep and regular breathing that his companions slept.

The circular window, of which he spoke, was close to him. The wooden shutter, with which it was provided to exclude the wet when necessary, was drawn over it; but as it only fitted rudely, he could see the night sky through many a chink and crevice in and round about it.

In contrast with the interior it looked quite light.

Before he laid down again and composed himself to sleep, Jack thought it would be no harm to draw aside this shutter, and have a look at the appearance of things outside.

Accordingly, he crept towards it as quietly as he could, for he by no means wished to disturb the repose of his companions.

The woodwork was swelled or damp, for the shutter stuck firmly in its frame.

A little patience, however, enabled him to push it on one side silently, so that a space was left large enough for him to put his head through and look out.

Before him was the inn.

The sky was cloudy, the wind blowing occasionally with great violence, and then subsiding almost to a calm.

Through the rifts in the clouds, which were continually opening and closing up, came a faint, grayish-white light, by the aid of which he could see for a considerable distance around him.

The stable was built at the rear of the "Fox and Grapes," but the stable window was so situated as to command a view of the high road in the direction of London.

Along this he gazed, until it could no longer be distinguished from the surrounding meadows.

A solemn stillness was everywhere about. Not even the hooting of an owl, or the whirring sound of the bats, as they winged their nocturnal flight, could be heard.

But suddenly a faint sound smote upon Jack's ear.

He listened, but this time in vain.

He could not hear it.

A sudden furious gust of wind swept by, which made noise enough to drown all other sounds.

When it subsided again, however, he listened even more intently and eagerly than before.

"Horsemen!" he muttered, after a few moments' pause; "they are well mounted, too, and coming at great speed. Who are they, I wonder? 'The dragoons, perhaps, who may have got upon our track. Now I hear them. Why, there must be a score of horses, at least, to raise a sound like that."

He projected his head yet further out of the circular window, and bent all his faculties to listening.

This time there could be no possible mistake. The clatter of the horses' hoofs could be plainly enough distinguished. They were, however, at a great distance. Only the stillness that prevailed could have enabled him to hear them at all.

"I will wake them up," he said, alluding to his comrades; "it may bode no special harm to us, and we may not be in any special danger; still it is best to be prepared."

Acting upon this conviction, he drew in his head.

The breathing was quite sufficient to guide him to the exact spots where his companions lay.

He was well aware that the soundest sleep may generally be broken by a touch. He came to Dick Turpin first, for he happened to be nearest to him.

He placed his hand upon his face, and said:

"Hist! Wake up, Dick, and be prepared for action. There may be danger!"

Turpin was awake instantly.

"Crawl to the window yonder," said Jack, "while I wake the others. You will not need me to tell you what is the matter."

Dreading the worst, Turpin crawled to the window.

While he did so, Jack hastily roused up Claude Duval and Tom King.

There are some who, for the first few minutes after they are awakened, are scarcely conscious of what is going forward, but our friends were not of these.

Danger was a word sufficient at once to put them into full possession of all their mental faculties.

Eagerly and excitedly they all crawled to the window.

"What is it? What is amiss?" asked Claude and Tom King, anxiously.

"Hark!" replied Sixteen-String Jack. "Cannot you hear the tramp of horses' hoofs?"

"Yes."

"And what is more," added Turpin, "I can see them! I should think twenty, at least!"

"They are coming from London?"

"Apparently."

"Then they are our foes?"

"There is little doubt of that."

"Look, Dick, again. Can you make out what they are?"

"No; they are at too great a distance. All I can see is a dark moving mass."

"How shall we act?"

"That is hard to say."

"There is but one course open to us," said Claude.

"And what is that?"

"To stay here where we are, and conceal ourselves as best we can. We stand no chance of leaving here unperceived."

"But little, I am afraid," said Turpin.

"It cannot be done."

"We may, after all, be alarming ourselves without a cause," said Jack. "They surely cannot have any special knowledge of our whereabouts. Perhaps they have only a suspicion that we are on this road, and if so, they will be almost sure to ride past."

"We shall have our doubts set at end soon," said Tom King. "They must be very close now. Can you make them out yet?"

"Yes; I think I can."

"And are they the dragoons?"

"That I cannot say for certain, but they are mounted soldiers of some sort, and well armed, for I can see the glitter of their weapons."

"It is them, then, safe enough."

"How far should you take them to be off?"

"About half a mile."

"Draw in your head, then, for fear you should be seen. It is never worth while to run unnecessary risks."

"You are right," said Dick Turpin, drawing in his head, for during the foregoing conversation he alone had been looking out, while the others crouched down close behind him.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

RELATES WHAT TOOK PLACE UPON THE ARRIVAL OF DRAGOONS AT THE "FOX AND GRAPES."

The approaching soldiers came on at a gallop, which seemed to shake the very earth.

It was Tom King who drew back the shutter to its full extent as he said:

"That will be much better. If we lie down all of us we shall be able to see, without running much risk of being seen."

This was so obvious that all followed his suggestion, and then looked with straining eyes and slightly quickened pulses at the approaching cloud, for such it seemed.

Suddenly, however, the clouds opened overhead, and a brighter light was shed upon the scene. The forms of the approaching horsemen were now plainly visible.

They were either the same troop of light dragoons, which had previously chased them, or another detachment from the same regiment, for their accoutrements were just the same.

The closer they came, and the more plainly they saw them, the further our friends drew back.

It should be distinctly understood that the window we have so often mentioned was situated in the gable end of the stable, and a view straight up the road could be obtained from it.

On came the soldiers, showing no signs of diminishing their speed.

Our friends' hearts beat high with the hopes that they would sweep by, and leave them unmolested.

Neither ventured to speak. All their attention was absorbed in watching and listening.

The voices of the riders, and the ringing sound occasionally produced as their weapons clashed against each other, could now be distinctly heard.

Two more minutes would carry them past the front of the inn.

The question was, would they go past, or would they draw up?

They could only ascertain by mastering their impatience for yet a little longer.

Little did they think of the danger they were actually in.

The state of the ostler's mind was quite unknown to them.

They did not entertain the slightest doubts as to his good faith.

If they had they would not have taken things so quietly as they did.

"Are the soldiers going to stop?" was the question that occupied their minds to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

They almost held their breaths as they came still nearer.

And now Dick's eyes caught sight of a human figure standing at the gateway leading to the highway from the stable-yard.

A second glance showed him it was the ostler.

He did not speak, but raised his arm and pointed.

The other three turned their eyes in that direction.

A suspicion that all was not well crossed their minds, and then deepened into conviction.

Before, however, they had time to adopt any particular mode of action, the troop of dragoons, with a sudden dash, pulled up in front of the inn.

They gave themselves up for lost.

While the tramping was subsiding they heard a loud voice say—

"Hallo! there; who are you?"

The question lifted a load off their minds.

It showed them that the suspicious they had entertained were baseless.

The ostler was not in collusion with the dragoons.

He had not connived to bring them there.

Chance alone had done it.

But why his presence at the gates at that late hour, when one would have thought all persons were asleep?

That looked suspicious.

These thoughts flashed simultaneously through their minds in the brief interval which elapsed between the officer asking the question and the ostler replying to it.

"I'm the ostler," he replied; "Who are you?"

"Don't be insolent, fellow."

"I ain't insolent."

"I tell you you are."

"I tell you I ain't."

The officer seemed upon the point of breaking out into a rage, but by a great effort he controlled himself.

Probably he thought he would be demeaning himself too far to fall into a passion with an ostler.

Choking with rage, he cried—

"Let me advise you to be careful."

"Thank you all the same, I am. How are you?"

"In the king's name!" cried the officer, who was the same hot-headed individual who had ordered the charge to be made upon the mob, and who was now more than ever disgusted with his task of hunting highwaymen. "In the king's name I call upon you to answer my questions truthfully and without prevarication!"

"Fire away," said Joe, "I'm a-listening; what do you want to know?"

"We are armed with a warrant for the apprehension of three notorious villains, known respectively by the names of Richard Turpin, Claude Duval, and Jack Rann, alias Sixteen-String Jack. They have with them one Thomas King, who is under sentence of death. I call upon you in the king's name to say whether you have seen them."

"I don't know as ever I seed 'em," said Joe.

"How long have you been standing here?"

"That's my business."

"Be careful, or it will be my duty to arrest you on suspicion."

"Suspicion of what?"

"Being an accomplice."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Do not dally with us any longer. Have you been standing here long?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"Have you seen four men go by, mounted on three horses, during the last two or three hours?"

"No, I haven't," said Joe.

This was perfectly true.

He had not seen them go by.

"You haven't?"

"Certainly not, though I haven't been standing here all the while, but I should have heard them."

"But your conduct is suspicious."

"Is it?"

"Yes. You seem to be waiting for something."

"So I am."

"What is it?"

"I don't see as I ought to tell you. You've got a dress, and look very grand, but you're an awful trou-

some fellow. However, if it will do you any good, I will tell you what I am waiting for."

"What is it?"

"The Uxbridge coach."

"The Uxbridge coach?"

"Yes. I have been expecting it ever so long, and here it comes at last."

At this moment, in confirmation of Joe the ostler's words, the loud blast of a horn rung shrilly on the night air.

"There she is. The Dreadnought; but she's behind her time."

"Curse the Dreadnought!"

"Oh! as you please."

"And you haven't heard any one pass?"

"No."

"Nor seen them either?"

"No."

The officer turned round, and spoke in a low tone to those who were nearest to him.

The reader can conceive what pleasure the highwaymen felt when they found the ostler so determined to stand their friend, and throw the soldiers off the scent.

In breathless eagerness they waited for what was going to happen next.

The guard on the coach blew his horn again, and the rumbling of the wheels began to be heard as the unwieldy vehicle came bowling along the highway.

The officer of dragoons could make nothing of Joe.

Nor was there any suspicion attaching to his conduct, for, for all that he knew, it might be part of his duties to await the arrival of the coach.

But, if he was not suspicious, he was not satisfied.

"How long have you been here? Tell me," he said.

"About ten minutes."

"No longer?"

"Well, I won't swear it hasn't been a quarter of an hour, for the coach is late to-night."

"We have the most positive information that the persons of whom we are in search are somewhere on this road."

"Well, I don't say they ain't, because it's likely enough they are, but I haven't heard them. Lor bless yer! they'd be cunning enough not to make much noise in passing a house."

"There's something in that."

"If you'll take my advice, you'll wait till the coach comes, and then ask if they have met any suspicious looking characters on the road."

"A good thought! I will."

"Here it comes, then! You won't be kept long a-waiting."

From where the highwaymen were concealed, it was not possible to obtain a view of the road leading to Uxbridge, but they could tell by the grinding of the wheels that the coach was not very far off.

The troop of dragoons placed themselves in a straggling sort of line across the road.

In a few minutes afterwards the coach pulled up.

"In the king's name," cried the officer, "I call upon you in the king's name. Have you passed any horsemen on the road?"

"No, ne'er a one," replied the driver.

"You are quite sure!"

"In coorse I am!"

"Let me tell you there are four highwaymen on the road to-night."

A chorus of screams from the passengers followed upon this announcement.

"Four highwaymen?"

"Yes; and four as desperate villains as ever breathed. I am charged with a special warrant from the Secretary of State to apprehend them and lodge them in jail, and empowered to call upon any one to assist me in so doing."

"I only hopes you'll catch them, that's all! But you may take your oath they are nowhere between here and Uxbridge, or else I should have seed 'em!"

"That is enough!"

The soldiers drew on one side, and allowed the coach to pass.

The coachman cracked his whip, and off the horses started on their way to London at a capital pace.

The officer of dragoons looked half a mind to follow on, when he asked suddenly—

"How long does the coach take to reach here from Uxbridge?"

"About half an hour, I should think."

"Then it's likely enough they passed before the coach started. Forward, my men, they are somewhere on this road, I am confident, and to find them I am determined. Forward!"

CHAPTER CLXIV.

JOE, THE OSTLER, MAKES ALL THE REPARATION FOR HIS FAULT THAT HE IS ABLE, AND THEN ADVISES THE HIGHWAYMEN AS TO THE BEST COURSE FOR THEM TO TAKE.

In obedience to the command given to them by their superior officer, the troop set itself in motion and were soon at a considerable distance from the "Fox and Grapes."

And so the great danger which had threatened our friends, thanks to Joe, the ostler, had passed away, leaving them unhurt.

They could scarcely believe in the reality of their narrow escape.

Joe watched the retreating horsemen down the road to see that none of them lingered behind, and then turned towards the stable.

Dick looked out.

"Joe," he said; "Joe, come here."

Now Joe had no idea the highwaymen were awake. He thought, somehow, that they were asleep all this time, and he felt confused.

That was because his conscience smote him for what he had meditated doing.

"Come up here, Joe, I want to speak to you."

"All right, Captain, I'll be with you in a moment."

And he was as good as his word, for in less than the time mentioned he stood beside them.

"Joe!" they all four cried, "you have saved our lives! What can we do to show our gratitude?"

"Don't say a word about that, I don't deserve it."

"Not deserve it?"

"No, I do not, and I may as well be candid with you as not."

"But you deceived the soldiers."

"I know I did."

"You put them off the scent when they had us in their power."

"I know that, too."

"Has not that course saved our lives? To be sure it has, and how can we be otherwise than grateful?"

"I tell you I don't deserve that you should think so well of me."

"Why not?"

"What do you think is the reason I was up and dressed and standing at the gate when the soldiers arrived?"

"We have no idea. You told them you were waiting for the coach."

"Just so."

"And wasn't that the reason?"

"No; I wish it was."

"Can you tell us it? We are curious."

"I will tell you, though it will cause me to lose your good opinion, but better do that than hold it wrongfully."

"Speak on. You need not fear."

"But you do not know what I have to say."

"Nor do I want to know, if you would rather not tell it."

Poor Joe was silent. His emotions mastered him. He was full of remorse for the deed he had contemplated.

But yet, with a candour which cannot be sufficiently admired, he made up his mind to tell them.

He little thought it, but by resolving upon such a course, his fault was more than half atoned for.

The highwaymen noticed his agitation, and were very much surprised at it. They knew not what to think.

"Have patience a minute," said Joe, "and I will tell you."

"You need not, if it is something so painful to you."

"But I will. I went to the gateway because I had made up my mind to go to London."

"To London?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"To betray you."

It is impossible to describe the tone in which these three words were uttered. Equally vain would it be to paint the astonishment of our four friends.

"They were incredulous."

"Betray us?"

Joe did not reply.

"You cannot be in earnest, Joe," said Dick Turpin, kindly, for he felt deeply touched by the manner in which the lad had behaved. "You cannot be in earnest?"

"I was," said Joe, in a choking voice; "and you never ought to trust me any more."

"But," asked Claude Duval, "if you had made up your mind to betray us, why did you behave in the manner you did to the dragoons?"

"I repented then, though when I first saw them coming, I made up my mind to tell them you were here. It was the reward that did it."

"The reward?"

"Yes. How much do you think the rewards that are offered for all four of you would amount to if they were added up together?"

"A very large amount, and enough to tempt anyone."

"Do you think so?"

"Assuredly."

"Bear with me, then, and think no worse of me than you can possibly help. When I left you, and had groomed the horses, the thought came into my head to add up the rewards."

"And how much did they come to?"

"Two thousand pounds!"

"Why, that's five hundred a-piece!" said Turpin.

"There is more offered for you than any of the others."

"And when you added it up, you thought how desirable it would be for you to possess such a sum."

"I did; but I didn't think of getting all of it; now do you know the reason why I so wished to obtain a portion?"

"What is it? You have told us all so far pretty freely, and if, as I suspect, this is something in your favour, by all means let us hear it."

"I don't know for it being in my favour, but, you must know, I have a mother."

"Alive?"

"Yes, and very poorly off. She depends wholly upon me for all she has, but, as this is not much of a place, it is but little I am able to take her."

"I begin to understand."

"That is not all," said Joe. "There is—there is——"

"What?"

"Some one I am fond of."

"Oh!"

"But she will not have me until I have saved money enough to take a public-house myself."

"And very prudent of her."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you see now what I thought."

"Pretty clearly, I think," said Turpin. "You have a mother and a sweetheart, of both of whom you are fond. The one you would like to see much better off, the other you want to see your wife. Is that it?"

"It is."

"And with the reward you would have been able to do all this, and which, without some such slice of luck, you would have to wait a long time for."

"That is just what I thought."

"Then I do not for a moment wonder that you contemplated giving us up to justice. Do you, my friends?"

"Not at all!"

"In fact, I wonder you held back. You have not told us what caused you to alter your mind when the dragoons came up. Did you think there would be too many to share the reward with to make your portion worth having?"

"No; that was not it!"

"What then?"

"I hardly know, but I think it was more the manner in which the officer spoke to me than anything else."

"Now, Joe," said Turpin, "listen to me."

"Can it be possible that you wish to be friends with me after this?"

"Certainly; I think very highly indeed of you!"

"And you are willing to forgive me for my baseness?"

"Every excuse possible can be made for you. Will you listen to me?"

"You know I shall."

"Now do not be offended at what I am going to say, nor refuse what I am going to offer. Will you meet me at Stonebridge, about half a mile from here, at twelve o'clock to-morrow night?"

"For what?"

"I will then reward you for what you have done."

"I deserve no reward."

"Do not say that, because I think otherwise. Will you meet me?"

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it."

"And may I ask the reward you intend to offer me?"

"Yes; I have no reason for concealing it from you. I will give you the means of accomplishing your desires."

"You will?"

"I certainly will."

"After the manner in which I have behaved?"

"It is just that which determines me to act as I have said. What do you say, my friends? Do you approve?"

"Most certainly, and we will do all we can to assist you."

"Thanks. I knew such would be the case. Now, Joe, we have wasted rather more time perhaps in talking than we ought to have done, but never mind, so that we understand each other. The dragoons are far enough off by this time."

"They are; and, if you will take my advice, you will have your horses saddled without delay, and set off in an opposite direction."

"We will; but now, Tom, that reminds me of your difficulty. How are you to manage for a horse?"

"I know not," replied Tom King, "without Joe here can provide us with one. Can you?"

"I can, if you will pay me for it."

"Very well; Claude, I fancy, can manage to do that. Let us have them at once."

"Come down, then. They only want the saddles clapped on their backs, and you can assist and save time."

The highwaymen followed Joe down the ladder, and the saddles were quickly put on.

The horse that was brought out for Tom to buy, was one that had been left with the ostler to sell.

The price was forty guineas. Claude had onough, so the horse was bought, and Tom mounted it.

"Now, Joe," said Dick Turpin, as they quietly walked their horses out of the stable-yard, "don't forget to be at Stonebridge at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, and I will place in your hands a sufficient sum of money to enable you to gratify your wishes."

"I don't deserve it," blubbered Joe, as the highwaymen rode away.

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN LEAVE THE "FOX AND GRAPES," AND LAY IN WAIT FOR THE OXFORD COACH. "I FAIRLY tremble," said Sixteen-String Jack, "when I think what a frightfully narrow escape we have had, though no one could blame the lad for acting in the manner he did."

"I cannot, for one. Little did the officer think that his hot temper was the means of losing us."

"Which way shall we take?" inquired Claude Duval. "You are our captain, Dick, and we are under your commands."

"Then let us push on to the Oxford-road. If we keep on for about half a mile, and take the first turning to the left, it will bring us out at Harlington-corner. Do you know it?"

"Quite well."

"Forward, then, because the sooner we are off the Uxbridge-road the better."

Brief as was the rest the horses had had, yet it was long enough to enable them to recruit their strength, and not only that, they had been well-fed and groomed.

They, therefore, willingly responded to the impulse forward which their riders gave them, and swept at a swinging gallop along the turnpike road.

Tom King was pleased to find that the horse he had purchased bore every indication of being a good one, and of a kind well suited to his requirements.

Upon turning into the lane, however, they were compelled to go at a slower pace, for it was very narrow, and had two deep ruts on either side, where the cart-wheels had been.

Dick took advantage of this opportunity to speak to his friends, and unfold his views.

Accordingly, when they were all close enough together for conversation to be easy, he spoke.

"We have succeeded so far," he said, "in eluding our foes, and making their plans of no avail. That they have tried what they could do is tolerably certain, and now, just for a change, I propose that we try what we can do in return."

"Agreed, captain—agreed!" cried the three others.

"What is it you propose?"

"A bold and daring deed at any time, but now unusually so."

"What is it?"

"Cannot you guess?"

"No—no. Tell us, do not keep us in suspense."

"I will not. I propose, my friends, that when we get into the Oxford-road, which we shall do in about half an hour—"

"Yes—yes."

"When we get there, I propose we look for some dark and sheltered piece of roadway, and there lay in wait."

"But for what?"

"The Oxford Mail Coach!"

"Are you in earnest, Dick?" asked Claude.

"Never more so in my life."

"It is a daring deed, then."

"So much the better. I like to achieve exploits that will bear talking about."

"But it will sure to be crowded with passengers, and the guard and the driver, it is well known, have been chosen as being brave men, and well able to make use of the weapons with which they are provided."

"I know all that," said Dick, "but I do not see anything in it to cause me to alter my determination."

"Let us do it," said Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack; "the bolder the deed the better it pleases me. As for Claude—"

"I shall give way to the majority," said Duval; "but while I do so I think we are running into much unnecessary peril."

"We have been in greater many a time. Come, Claude, shake off your fears."

"I have none."

"Here we are, then," cried Dick Turpin, as they emerged into the Oxford-road, "let us try our luck."

He proceeded to make an examination of the priming of his pistols as he spoke, in doing which he was immediately imitated by his companions.

All being made secure, they trotted on at a gentle pace, expecting every moment to hear some sound indicative of the coming of the coach.

The place, however, where they now found themselves was scarcely so well suited to their purpose as they could have wished.

The country for miles around was open, and the hedgerows more than ordinarily low.

It was getting much lighter, too, every moment, and in the east a faint misty radiance foretold that before long it would be daybreak.

Of course, had the mail-coach come along while they were in this part, Dick would not have changed his determination of stopping it, but, as it was, he deemed it good policy to move on and meet it.

A gallop of about ten minutes, though, brought him to a place which seemed expressly made for his design.

The ground rose up to a slight elevation.

Instead, however, of the road passing over it, as is generally the case, a path had been cut through it, thus doing away with the steep ascent that there would have been on one side.

But doing this had its disadvantages as well as its advantages, though probably the latter more than balanced

the former, as it made the road for a few yards very dismal and dark indeed.

In the highest part, the embankment on either side was about fifteen feet in height.

The sides were as perpendicular as a wall almost, and were profusely overgrown with rank vegetation.

The top of the embankment was fringed by a quick-set hedge.

From the foregoing description, it will be seen that, although the road was of a good width, yet the sides were more than sufficient to cast a dark shadow over it.

In the day time even, except when the sun was at his greatest elevation, it was a dark-looking place, and at night it was all but impossible to see your hand before you.

Well suited therefore was it in all respects for the successful accomplishment of the daring adventure upon which the highwaymen were bent.

The only thing now necessary was for the coach to come.

All their preparations being made, our friends did not speak, but sat like statues on their horses in various picturesque, listening attitudes.

Dick Turpin and Tom King had taken up their stations close to each other on the south side of the road.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, in a similar manner on the opposite side, only lower down towards London.

They were to attack the fore-part of the coach.

The others the rear.

Minute after minute passed by, but still they could hear nothing like the grinding of wheels.

They began to be fearful that they were too late—that the coach had passed.

So dark as it was, seeing the time was quite out of the question.

Nor had they any clear idea of what the time was, only from the appearance of the sky they judged that dawn could not be far off.

In fact, they could find it growing lighter and lighter each instant.

If the coach did not come soon, they would have it daylight, and that would have by no means suited them.

At last, however, and just as their impatience had increased to an unbearable extent, the long-wished for sound arrived.

Very faint it was at first, like the rustling of the wind among the trees, and such by an unexperienced listener it would be taken to be, but long practice had enabled our friends to discriminate between the two.

The state of expectation in which they had been kept had put them in a proper mood to execute their daring feat.

The road was straight, and presently, as they looked along it, the bright carriage-lamps on either side became visible.

On—on they came, with a motion that appeared perpetually increasing.

The rumbling of the wheels sounded like the muttering of far-off thunder.

With their bridles tightly in their grasp, a loaded pistol in each of their left hands, our friends held themselves in readiness to attack the coach.

The guard blew a loud blast upon his horn as they entered the hollow, in order to warn anyone who might be there to get out of the way of the horses, for in the darkness that there prevailed it would be impossible for them to be seen.

The driver of the coach had just confessed to the passenger, who sat on his off-side, that he never felt very comfortable when driving through this dark bit of roadway, when a bright red flash appeared, followed almost instantaneously by the loud ringing report of a pistol.

A voice cried out, "Halt!" ere the reverberations had fairly died away.

The horses were terrified.

Claude Duval, who was nearest to them, by a sudden and dexterous movement of his hand, succeeded in throwing the leaders down.

Those behind could not avoid falling likewise.

They kicked and plunged fearfully.

But keeping out of the reach of their hoofs, Claude drew his sword, and watching his opportunity, in two strokes severed the traces.

While he was doing this his companions had not been idle.

We must describe their actions separately and in detail, though of course, they all happened simultaneously.

According to the arrangements made, Sixteen-String Jack spurred his steed as close as he could to the coachman's box, and holding a pistol pointed at his head, commanded him not to move at his peril.

But the coachman, who was not a man to give in lightly or easily, immediately drew a double-barrelled pistol from a little pocket in the seat, made purposely for its reception, and taking a hasty aim at the dusky figure, he pulled both triggers in rapid succession.

Jack managed to move aside in time to avoid the first bullet, but he was not equally fortunate with the second, for he felt something inflict a stinging sensation upon his cheek, as though he had been struck by a thin switch. He knew by this that the bullet had ploughed up the skin.

"Shot for shot!" he cried, as he pulled the trigger of his pistol and fired.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE TIDE OF FORTUNE, WHICH HAS BEEN FOR SO LONG IN FAVOUR OF THE HIGHWAYMEN, NOW TURNS AGAINST THEM.

A LOUD yell of a most awful and startling character followed the discharge of Sixteen-String Jack's pistol, and the coachman, after awaying to one side, fell headlong off the box.

The cry was echoed by the passengers on the roof, who were now in a state of the greatest possible alarm, and almost dead with fright.

"Move not, at your peril!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, drawing another pistol and pointing it at them, for his blood was now thoroughly heated, and he did not much care what he did.

The passengers on the roof could tell he was a desperate character, and so obeyed his imperious demand, being fearful that their lives would not stand in his way, if they angered him.

And in this they were perfectly right, for the pain of the wound he had received in his cheek grew worse and worse every moment.

And now for Tom King.

He, as we said, was on the other side of the road.

When the coach was level with him, he sprang out, and held his pistol to the guard, and cried out to him not to move upon peril of his life.

But the guard had his hand upon the stock of the blunderbuss, which hung at the back of his seat.

Slowly and imperceptibly he raised it in his hand, until at length he got it so that its broad, bell-shaped mouth was pointing to Tom King.

His finger was on the trigger when Jack fired his pistol.

The flash dispelled the darkness, and Tom saw the bright barrel of the blunderbuss, with its muzzle turned towards him.

Comprehending what had taken place, in a moment he struck his horse sharply with the spur, which caused the animal to utter a snort of pain, and bound forward.

That saved his life.

The guard had his finger on the trigger, and he pulled it.

The blunderbuss exploded with a sound like that of some mimic cannon.

A perfect storm of bullets flew forth, but they did no execution.

They sank into the earth of which the embankment was composed, but that was all.

Turning his horse back, Tom held his pistol to the guard.

But fully believing that his last hour had come, he shrank down in his seat, and hid himself from sight.

The other passengers, with Jack at one end and Tom at the other, were cowed into perfect submission.

And now for the last, we proceed to describe the actions of Dick Turpin.

At the same moment that his companions sprang forward to do as we have described, Dick Turpin, by a particular touch upon her flank, which the gallant creature



[THE FARMER GIVES THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN A HOSPITABLE RECEPTION.]

fully understood, made Black Bess take one leap, and then alight just at the door of the coach.

There she stood, as though carved in stone, except she tossed her head proudly, as if in satisfaction at what she had done.

Long practice had taught Dick Turpin the knack of letting down a coach window rapidly and dexterously from the outside.

It made a terrible clattering noise.

"Your money or your life!" said Turpin, assuming as ferocious a tone and manner as he possibly could. "Do not dally with me. The coach is surrounded by my men, so that resistance will be futile. Hand over your valuables at once—to those who refuse their death will be on their own head."

As he spoke these words, he projected the barrel of the pistol which he carried into the coach.

By stooping slightly in the saddle, he was able to observe the actions of those within.

The inside was quite full of passengers, and by the

futter of dresses, as well as several screams which followed his appearance, he could tell some of them were females.

His principal attention, however, was directed to an individual who sat with his back to the horses, next to the door.

He was tall and well-built.

His attire was of sober black, and the coat he had on was one of unusually large dimensions.

Round his neck was an enormous frilled neckcloth, in which, whenever he bent his head, his chin was completely buried.

He had taken his hat off.

Upon his head he wore a large white wig, every hair and curl of which was scrupulously arranged so as to be in perfect order.

His face was large, full, and florid, having, in fact, that bloated appearance so conspicuous in the countenances of those who are too much addicted to the good things of this life.

His mouth was large and sensuous, his eyes small, deeply set and sleepy-looking.

All this Dick Turpin was able to take in at a glance.

But it was not that there was anything very peculiar in this person's appearance or costume that made him regard him with so much attention. It was because he felt a vague consciousness steal over him that he had seen that face before.

It was not a friend's, he was confident, nor was it under favourable circumstances that he had seen it.

All of a sudden, like a flash of light, Dick recollected not only where and when he had seen him, but also who he was.

It was the counsel who had prosecuted Tom King at the Old Bailey.

Consequently, Dick looked upon him as a foe, though of course the man had done nothing more than his duty.

It did not take an instant for all these thoughts to pass through Turpin's mind.

No attack, however, was attempted to be made upon him by any of those who occupied the interior of the coach.

Probably the reason of this was none of them carried arms.

In fact, the Oxford mail coach was looked upon as being about the safest conveyance that could possibly be imagined, and the idea of any highwaymen having the audacity to stop it and rob it was not dreamt of.

To those who were spectators of the scene, no interval was appreciable between the time Dick reached the coach-door and took off his hat.

The light in the inside fell with full force upon his countenance.

It was far, very far indeed from being an unpleasant one. There was upon it an expression of dauntless courage, which no one would fail to admire.

He had dropped the reins upon the neck of Black Bess, for he knew that he could safely trust her not to move, and this allowed him to have both hands at liberty.

In one, then, he held his hat, and in the other a pistol.

He repeated his demand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I must trouble you for all you have of any value. If you are wise, you will give it up at once. You cannot possibly escape, for the coach is well surrounded by the men who acknowledge me as their captain. If I cannot obtain what I want by gentle means, I shall be compelled to have you dragged out, one by one and searched. But this I shall not do if you will satisfy my wants. Come, my hat is before you."

This was said with an air of the greatest apparent ease, but all the time Dick took good care to keep a sharp eye upon every one, and was quite prepared for any sudden movement that boded danger to him.

But the passengers, finding the hopeless predicament they were in, like sensible people, preferred to lose their money rather than risk their lives, so they began slowly one after another, to drop different articles into the hat.

Watches, brooches, seals, bracelets, purses, and loose cash all made their appearance.

But there was nothing like so much in the hat as Turpin considered there ought to be.

Another demand produced a trifle more.

"Really," said Dick, at length, "if you go on in this way I shall lose what small amount of patience I am blessed with, and then when I do I will not be answerable for the consequences. Come be generous. I have been temperate where many would have been violent. I should be sorry to subject any one of you to the least ill-usage, and you ought to give me full credit for my consideration, when you find you are so entirely in my power."

The obviousness of this at once struck home to the hearts of all, and they gave up their things freely, being satisfied that, under the circumstances, it was the best course they could possibly pursue.

They had two disagreeable alternatives.

One was, to give up what they had.

The other, to have it taken from them.

The result of both was just the same, and so the first was clearly the lesser evil of the two.

In a few minutes it was heavy enough to satisfy him, and so drawing back his arm and replacing the pistol in the holster, he quickly transferred the booty to the capacious pocket of his coat.

While he did so, his ears caught the sound of some one weeping, while every now and then utterance was given to a deep and heart-breaking sob.

One of the inmates of the coach was in trouble about something.

What that something was, Dick determined at all risks to find out.

Of course it was no other than a female who thus manifested her grief.

And was it not his duty, as he emulated the doings of the knight-errant of old, to succour, protect, and comfort all females in distress?

CHAPTER CLXVII.

A VISION OF GENTLENESS, BEAUTY, AND GRIEF APPEARS TO DICK, WHICH AROUSES THE DORMANT FEELINGS OF HIS BETTER NATURE.

LEANING forward, then, in his saddle, Dick put his head inside the window of the coach.

Its inmates observed it with surprise, and began to fear that the highwayman was not satisfied with what he had extorted from them already.

But this alarm was soon dissipated.

In a kindly tone of voice, and which he could always assume without an effort, Dick spoke:

"I can hear some one weeping," he said, "which is sufficient to show me that one of you is in trouble. Whoever it may be, I conjure them to speak, and if it lies in my power to do anything to assuage their grief, believe me I shall only be too glad to do it."

A profound silence followed these words.

No one replied to him in any way, but he still heard the sobs, as though a violent effort was being made to stifle them.

"Speak," said Dick again, after a brief pause, and in a more earnest tone of voice than before. "Fear nothing. Who is in sorrow?"

"You speak kindly," said a woman's voice, "and so I do not mind telling you that it is this young girl who is sitting next to me who is crying so, but whether you can do her any good is more than I can tell."

As she spoke, the woman drew on one side and allowed Turpin to catch a glimpse of a young girl who was sitting next to her, and leaning as far back as she could, as if in the endeavour to escape observation.

She was dressed entirely in black.

Her face he could not see, for she had concealed it in a white cambric handkerchief, which she held up to her eyes.

What her age might be he could not, therefore, guess, except from a contemplation of her form, and as its contours were only partially developed, he came to the conclusion that she must be young—fifteen or sixteen at most.

The hand that held the handkerchief before her face was as tiny as a child's. But the fingers were long and wasted, looking as though her grief had been great and incessant, and as if she had suffered much.

The moment Dick's eyes rested upon this young creature, he felt an immediate and deep interest in her.

He longed to see her face.

That it was a very beautiful one he did not doubt.

With a still greater depth of pathos than had tinged his words before, he addressed her.

"Fair girl," he said, "answer me, as a great and inestimable favour, the question I am about to ask you. You are in deep—very deep grief. I am a rude, violent man, but I am willing, nay, anxious to stand your friend. Tell me then, without fear, whether it lies in my power to alleviate your sorrow."

The counsel who had prosecuted Tom King, and who resolutely disbelieved that there was anything like disinterested kindness in human nature, moved impatiently round in his seat, and uttered an indignant "Pish!"

Dick just glanced at him, but took no further notice just then.

As for the other passengers, they were one and all deeply moved at the manner in which the highwayman was acting.

There was something about his whole air and manner that was sufficient to convince them that he was playing a part, but that he was quite in earnest in what he said, and unquestionably would, if the opportunity was

offered him, try his utmost and do his best to ease that young heart of its anguish.

The woman who had before spoken, and moved to allow Dick Turpin to see the girl, now bent over her, and by her manner it was evident that she was endeavouring to persuade the young girl to speak, and, if she did no more, at least to thank the highwayman for the interest he had manifested in her welfare.

Her arguments had their effect, for the young girl removed the handkerchief from her face.

The light fell upon it.

In all his experience, and, as the reader may imagine, it had been tolerably extensive—never, Dick thought, had he seen a human face so nearly like what an angel's might be supposed to be as that one was.

Not even the painter's art, wondrous though it be, could do justice to its singular and rare beauty.

How insufficient, then, must words be to convey an impression of it.

We shall not attempt the task, but simply say that it was a reflex of the holiest and best feelings in human nature.

But the whole was chastened, overspread, and softened by the traces of grief—deep, permanent, inconsolable.

There was a strange feeling about Dick's heart—a feeling which he had never until that moment felt—as he gazed upon this heavenly face, and felt her dark eyes fixed in earnest gaze upon him.

How great the contrast!

The one the personification of gentleness, purity, and holiness.

The other of plunder, violence, and sin.

And yet Dick Turpin, as many of his actions have testified, was far from being all that is bad in humanity. There were many who, in his day, were looked up to with respect, and whose names even now are held in reverence, who were far worse than he.

But, nevertheless, he felt a strange aching in his breast, and a choking sensation in his throat, as he thought how great a gulf there was between them.

Even as her eyes met his for a brief instant in that mournful gaze, they filled with tears, and she again carried the handkerchief to her face.

But feeling that gratefulness alone ought to compel her to command her feelings sufficiently to express her thanks, she made a strong and successful effort to subdue her grief.

And then, when she would fain have spoken a few words, utterance was denied her, and the words passed away in an inaudible murmur.

In the deep and absorbing interest which Dick felt in this little episode, all other things faded from his mind. He no longer thought of the perils and difficulties of his situation, nor remembered that his life at that moment hung upon a thread.

"Speak," he said, still more gently. "Let me have the satisfaction of hearing you say that it is in my power to relieve you of at least some portion of your distress. Speak to me frankly."

"I will try," replied the young girl, who found her voice at last. "You speak kindly to me, and so—so—you see you spoke so kindly that—that—I could not bear it."

The tones in which she spoke, though very, very sad, were low, sweet, and silvery.

Dick was still more entranced.

Those other passengers, too, who had up to then looked on this scene with indifference and coldness, began, in spite of themselves, to feel an interest in it.

So modest and retiring had this young girl been during the whole of their long journey, that they were scarcely sensible of her presence and existence.

Now they began to wonder how it was they had not noticed her.

All but the prosecuting counsel had an expression on their faces significant of sympathy, but he looked on contemptuously.

"I have nothing to tell you, sir," continued the young girl, whose voice grew firmer as she proceeded, "at least nothing that will interest you. Believe me, I am very, very grateful to you for your kind expressions of good feeling towards me, and I shall always pray that you may quit this kind of life, for which you are so unsuited."

A shade passed over Dick Turpin's face.

It was one of vexation.

But he chased it away quickly; but when he spoke again there was a perceptible alteration in his voice.

The young girl sank back again into her old position, and replaced the handkerchief over her face.

"Is that all you have to say to me?" asked Turpin.

There was no reply.

He was almost choked, but he continued.

"Can I do nothing to assist you? If I can, pray let me know it. It will enable me to in part atone for that which I have done to-night."

The girl again looked up.

"There is only one thing," she said, "and that I ought not to ask."

"Why not?"

"I ought not."

"Will you let me hear it, and allow me to judge whether you ought to ask it?"

Again silence.

"Speak! Let me hear it! Cannot you grant me that favour?"

A flush mounted to her face, and spread over her neck and forehead, as she replied—

"I am an orphan, and the clothes I wear will show that my bereavement has been recent. It has been sudden, too. Both my parents died within a week of each other, and not ten days ago! I am on my way to London, where my relatives reside, and where I trust I shall soon find employment. I am poor, and now destitute, for when you held your hat inside the coach, and commanded us with threats to put into it what valuables we each possessed—threatening us if we refused—I placed in it a small, beaded purse, which contains every farthing I possess in the world; I have not even enough to pay the expenses of my journey, and what I shall do I know not. Your last behaviour has been so different to the former, that I have overcome the repugnance I felt in speaking to you; but now that I have done as you wished, I trust you will withdraw, and allow us to proceed without offering further violence."

It would be hard to say what were Dick's sensations while the girl addressed this long speech to him. The grievous manner in which she spoke, and the utter desolation of her position, cut him to the heart.

How much additional sorrow, too, had he caused her?

His hand stole to the pocket of his coat, and he sought among its miscellaneous contents for something that felt like a beaded purse.

He drew it forth.

"You would have asked me to restore it to you?" he said. "I do it gladly. If this is it, take it freely. It will ever be a reproach to me when I think of to-night's doings."

So saying, Dick held the purse towards her.

It was of blue silk, elaborately worked with steel beads. It was of a kind now grown obsolete, with sliding rings, and a receptacle for money at both ends.

But as he thus held it in his hand he could not help noticing how slender and how light it was, and what a little money it contained.

"That is it," said the girl, beginning to weep again.

"My mother worked that purse, and gave it to me on my last birthday."

"Take it back, then," said Turpin, as he placed it in her hand, "and with it my best wishes, though I suppose they will not do you any good. I take shame to myself, however, that I—"

"Off with you, Dick! off with you!" cried a voice; "fly at once! The Philistines are upon us!"

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

THE OFFICERS THINK THAT THEY HAVE AT LAST GOT THE HIGHWAYMEN SECURE IN THEIR GRASP.

DICK TURPIN gave a great start at this sudden interruption to his apologetic speech.

He recognized the voice.

It was Claude Duval's.

If we were to say that he had completely, for the time being, forgotten the existence of his companions, we should scarcely be going beyond the truth.

In a moment, however, he recollected all, and he was once more calm and self-possessed, as he always was in the hour of extreme danger.

Bowing deeply, therefore, to the inmates of the carriage

generally, and the young orphan particularly, he, with great deliberation, left the coach door.

He could hear the sounds of many voices, and the clattering of horses' hoofs.

"Halt, all of you," he cried. "Halt!"

He wheeled his horse round as he spoke.

But before we proceed to relate what happened next, it will be necessary for us to describe the events which had transpired during the time Dick had been at the coach door.

Tom King, then, still remained in the position he had occupied, that is to say, he was at the back part of the coach, keeping the guard and the passengers near him in subjection.

Sixteen-String Jack was near the box. Not one of the passengers, after the summary manner in which he had dealt with the coachman, ventured to stir or make the least resistance.

Claude Duval, who had had the difficult duty of stopping the horses by throwing the leaders down, had been chosen for the execution of this duty because he was the tallest and by far the strongest of the four.

This, as we have seen, he had successfully performed. The leaders had been dexterously thrown down, and as they fell, brought the others to the ground with them.

By a few strokes of his sword, then, he severed the traces, and entirely freed the animals from all contact with the vehicle.

They plunged about madly for some moments, making it extremely dangerous for anyone to be near them.

Then they one after another struggled to their feet, and with a snort and a bound set off at a furious and frantic gallop along the road.

Their first fright over, they proceeded to their destination more steadily, being

—right glad to miss
The lumbering of the wheels.

All fear of the coach moving being now at an end, Claude rode up to the side and very coolly made those who sat outside hand him everything they had about them of the slightest value.

Menaced in the front and the rear, they could do nothing but submit.

Claude's pockets soon grew heavy.

His character had already been portrayed.

Cautious ever in running into danger, and willing to avoid running the slightest risk, yet, once in, no one could be more recklessly brave and daring.

He began to think, however, that to stop the Oxford mail was by no means so difficult and dangerous as it seemed.

But just as he had finished taking from the last person on the roof, he happened to look across the fields in the direction of London.

The dawn had sufficiently advanced to make objects even at a considerable distance dimly visible.

Coming along at a rapid pace, and with their arms extended towards him, was a large troop of mounted police-officers.

That they were aware of what was taking place, and making direct towards the coach, was quite certain; and it was when he had this conviction that he called out to Dick in the startling manner he did, as related at the end of the last chapter.

Not even the awe in which they were held by the pistols of Jack and Tom King could prevent those on the roof from giving utterance to a shout of gratification at the sight of this unexpected succour.

Although our highwaymen were not aware of the means by which the officers had learned what they were about—being, in fact, quite in the dark upon the subject—that is no reason, we opine, why we should not put the reader in possession of the facts of the case, for in this narrative it has been our special aim, even at the expense of interest, to avoid all inexplicable appearances.

We may briefly state, then, that this party of officers was one of many who had been despatched by the authorities upon the sole mission of watching the roads round the metropolis, and endeavouring to capture the highwaymen.

In fact, never before had such energetic steps been taken for the apprehension of any criminals, and no expense and no pains were spared to achieve their object.

Already have we seen how near they have more than once been in capturing our friends, but chance, fortune, or whatever it may be, had every time been in their favour.

But now they were menaced with a danger of no common kind.

The officers who now came over the fields were, without exception, experienced, well-tried men, and well up in the duties of their profession.

They had been set to patrol the Oxford-road, and be on the look-out for any event that might be of a suspicious character.

They were, moreover, not the only ones who had been sent out with similar instructions. Every road, indeed, leading from the metropolis was thus guarded, and the more important ones were furnished with as many as three or four detachments.

This, of course, necessitated the employment of a vast number of new hands, but none of these were sent upon this dangerous errand, but set to do the work which the others in an ordinary way performed.

The one body that had patrolled one portion of the Oxford-road during the whole of the night without the occurrence of anything unusual, and, as day was coming fast, they began to think that for that night at least they had had their trouble for nothing.

Chilly and miserable—for remaining on horseback the whole of a winter's night is no joke—they were thinking of turning in somewhere, when the sound of several steeds coming along the road at a headlong, break-neck gallop, reached their ears.

Fully impressed that something was going to happen at last, they became instantly on the alert.

There was about a score of them, so they formed in a double line across the road, determined to oppose the further progress of whoever might be coming.

Naturally enough, the idea they had had upon the subject was that those who were coming along at such a furious rate were the very individuals of whom they were in search, and the reason of their rapid speed, that the other detachment that was stationed nearer Oxford was chasing them.

Having formed this hypothesis, they began, as one may say, to count their chickens before they were hatched.

An old proverb particularly impresses the utter futility of doing this, and on the present occasion the wisdom of the advice was made powerfully apparent.

For, behold, instead of seeing the four redoubtable highwaymen approach, they beheld nothing but four riderless horses.

Their disappointment may be imagined, and it was more from the influence of this feeling than any other that they stopped where they then were.

The horses, which were those who had been out loose from the coach, seeing the obstruction in their path, came to a dead stop.

They were close enough, however, to enable the officers to perceive, by the assistance of the early morning light, that they had been cut away from some conveyance or other.

Then one of their number expressed his conviction that the horses were none other than those of the Oxford mail coach.

The number—four—served to confirm this assertion, and to bring his companions to the same belief.

"Then you may depend," said one, "that the villains have actually had the audacity to stop the mail, and that under our very noses."

"Pho, pho," said another, "I can hardly think it. They are daring, I admit, yet scarcely foolhardy enough to do such a trick as that!"

"Well, we don't know. Anyhow, we must go and see, and if it turns out as I expect, we must not let them escape, or if we do, we shall be laughed at all the rest of our lives."

"Be off at once, then," cried one, who was in command of the rest. "We shall lose our opportunity while we stand chattering here."

There was a sudden movement forward after the utterance of these words, and then the officer who had first spoken, said:

"Let us take to the fields, and by keeping under the shelter of the hedgerows, we shall be able to steal upon them unawares."

"A good idea that of yours, Nutkins," said the commanding officer, "and it shall be acted upon. Ride along, my men, gently and quietly, until we come either to a gap in the hedge that we can conveniently leap, or else a gate which we can open and pass through."

They did not have to go far along the road before they found a gate leading into the fields on the left-hand side of the road, and one of them dismounted to open it.

It was locked, but that proved a circumstance of little moment, for the officer took from his pocket a bunch of picklocks, and had it open in a trice.

In those days the line of distinction between officers and criminals was less clearly defined than it is now, and there were positively times when all traces of it were lost, and the one merged completely into the other.

Here was an instance.

The gate was held open while the rest passed through, and then secured again.

Their road was then plain before them.

Meadows stretched around in all directions.

Over these they were able to pass at a good speed, without making any noticeable noise.

They took care to keep as close to the highway as possible. But presently the appearance of the place altered. Instead of smooth, firm meadows, they came to a succession of ploughed fields.

Rapid progress over these was quite impossible, so they preferred to make a detour, believing that to be the quickest in the end.

It was after this, that turning round to get nearer the high-road, they saw the coach standing still, and surrounded by mounted men.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

A WOOD UPON THE OXFORD-ROAD AFFORDS A TEMPORARY PLACE OF SHELTER FOR THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THIS was a sight for which, despite their anticipations, the officers were scarce prepared.

But there was no doubt whatever as to what was going on.

They had arrived in time to see the highwaymen in the very act of plundering the coach.

Confident in the power which, in point of numbers, they had over them, and stimulated by the reward and credit they would gain if they secured them, they, with a boldness most remarkable, dashed their spurs into their horses' flanks, and urged them forward at the top of their speed.

It was a lucky thing for our friends that Claude was fortunate enough to see them as soon as he did, or the consequences might have been even more disastrous than they were.

The manner in which he called out we have already described.

Dick Turpin comprehended in an instant the full extent of his peril.

To have all four galloped off at random, and possibly in different directions, would, he felt sure, be fatal, and so he gave the loud command to halt.

His comrades obeyed instinctively. Already they began in good earnest to look up to him as their leader.

It was at this moment that the officers reached the hedgerow just before the cutting or hollow commenced.

Excited by the prospect of capturing the highwaymen, they leaped over into the roadway, and came on at a prodigious rate, and making a terrible clatter.

"Form together!" cried Turpin, as he saw them coming; "all together! Are you ready?"

"Quite," cried his three followers, as they ranged themselves close to him.

"Forward, then!" he exclaimed; "it is a case of the devil take the hindmost."

He himself set the example of retreating at full speed, for he spoke in a peculiar manner to his mare, and allowed her to feel the reins fall slackly on her neck.

She gave one terrific bound, and then flew over the ground with a long sweeping gallop.

Indeed, so great was the speed she attained, that Dick was compelled to rein her in, in order not to leave his companions.

Do what they would they could not make their cattle go even for a short distance at a speed that would match Black Bess.

And yet they were all animals of first-rate quality.

The officers, as soon as they perceived this sudden movement on the part of our friends, uttered a loud shout, and, as they dashed into the hollow, presented their pistols, and fired an irregular volley after their retreating forms.

The passengers in the coach implored the police to stay and render them some assistance, but they were quite deaf to their cries.

Their object was to catch the highwaymen, and, either dead or alive, lodge them in Newgate.

The horses upon which they were mounted could not be said to be exactly fresh, for they had been out all night with them patrolling the road, but they were not tired, as the progress they made testified.

Our friends, however, had got the start of them, though it was so slight as to be scarcely worth mentioning.

Away—away they went, the hoofs of their horses striking sparks of fire from the flint stones of the road.

It was towards Oxford, and away from London, that they went.

The officers kept well behind them.

They made sure they had their prey safe, if they could only manage for a little longer to keep them in sight, for they knew if they did so while the chase continued, they must eventually come up with the other troop, who were patrolling another portion of the same road.

Then, hemmed in before and behind by forty well-armed men, what hope could there be that our friends would escape.

They would be literally surrounded.

The odds ten to one.

But there was one condition upon which this depended, and that was that they should continue to fly along the highway.

If they left it the case would be quite altered.

Most eagerly did the officers look out ahead for some indications of the coming of the other troop.

The morning was a beautiful one.

The dense and heavy clouds which had during the night overspread the entire firmament seemed to be driven back by the first flush of dawn, as the pale gray light struggled into the sky.

But when the sun's beams rose above the horizon, they completed their dispersion.

And so, by the time the whole of his bright, rosy disc was fairly visible, there was not a cloud or speck of vapour to be seen.

His rays had in them but little warmth, still, for all that, they were not deficient in illuminative power, and where the ground rose up to a slight elevation, a very extensive prospect could be obtained.

It was after breasting the highest of these hills that they had yet come to that Dick Turpin pulled up his mare, and called out to his comrades to halt.

Then, turning round in his saddle, he took a long and careful look behind him.

His pursuers were hard upon their track, though the distance which intervened between them had perceptibly increased.

Having satisfied himself upon this point, Dick examined the road before him.

He could see for many miles, but nowhere anything suspicious in the shape of an obstruction.

Then he went down the hill at a walking pace, but descended only so far as to be in such a position as not to be within the range of their pursuers' vision.

He stopped.

"It will not do to keep up this sort of thing," he said, "or we shall assuredly be run to earth. Besides, I question whether your horses would maintain it."

"Mine would not," said Tom King; "I have noticed that during the last mile she has given palpable signs of flagging, and I believe she would have given up ere this had it not been that the example of the others encouraged her to make greater exertion. Look! now we have stopped, her distress becomes more apparent."

And, indeed, the appearance of Tom's steed was such as to fill our friends with the utmost concern.

That it would be able much longer to keep its legs was clearly impossible.

"What is the best thing to be done, captain?" asked Claude Duval. "It will not do for us to wait. Every second bring our pursuers nearer to us."

"True," said Turpin. "I stopped because I felt it would be madness to continue the chase any longer."

"But you do not dream, surely, of making a stand against so many?" said Sixteen-String Jack.

"We must either do that, or manage so as to get out of their way. What is to be done?"

"That is for you to decide."

"Well then," said Dick Turpin, as he cast a rapid look around him, taking in at a glance all the varied features of the landscape. "If you will take my advice"—

"We are bound to do that," cried his comrades. "You are our captain. It is for you to command, and for us to obey."

"Since you will have it so," said Dick, with a slight laugh, "agreed."

"What are your orders?"

"Follow me to yonder wood," said Turpin, pointing to a dense mass of trees on their left, a little further on. "If we can plunge into its intricacies unperceived, I think we may manage to elude them."

"It is the only chance we have," said Tom King, "and a poor one at best. We have no time to lose. Let us set off at once."

"Stay," said Dick, "we will borrow a hint from our pursuers. Over the hedge with you. Not only shall we be less likely to be heard, but we shall be able to gain the wood with less chance of detection."

There was common-sense in this, so watching for a spot where the hedge was a little lower than it was elsewhere, Dick put Black Bess to the leap.

The gallant animal cleared the obstruction, apparently without an effort, and alighted in a meadow.

Example is a great thing with many animals, and especially with horses, and the present proved a remarkable instance of it. Singly, neither of the other three horses would have cleared the hedge at the first attempt; as it was, they went over beautifully.

The meadow into which they leaped, although of great extent, was quickly crossed.

Beyond it was a ploughed field.

They were separated by a low wooden fence, which could scarcely be called an impediment to their progress.

"Keep to the path," cried Dick, taking the lead, and alluding to a well-beaten foot-road which ran along by the side of the hedge.

Along this they could only proceed in Indian file, and at a comparatively slow pace.

By bending their heads down to a level with the horses' necks, they found the hedge was both high and thick enough to screen them from the observation of any one who might be on the high-road.

This ploughed field was succeeded by another and another.

Then the wood was gained.

As soon as they found themselves fairly among the trees, they felt they were for a moment comparatively safe.

Without pausing, they pushed on in an oblique direction, for now that they were so silent they could hear the officers coming along the road at a furious rate.

Whether they had actually made their way into the wood unseen was, of course, more than they could take upon themselves to say, but they believed, or at any rate hoped, such was the case.

Brave, bold, and daring, as we know the four to be, those qualities would not be enough to enable them to cope with a force so much in point of members superior to theirs.

A fair fight between them might be protracted for a great length of time, but it would inevitably result in their defeat or death.

Even now they stood upon very dangerous ground, and we confess we feel no slight amount of anxiety in looking forward to the events which must now immediately ensue.

CHAPTER CLXX.

DICK TURPIN IS MINDFUL OF THE PROMISE HE MADE TO JOE, THE OSTLER, AND DETERMINES TO PERFORM IT.

THE reader should bear in mind that our friends had been upon the road for very many hours without resting, for their brief sojourn in the stable at the "Fox and Grapes" was scarcely worthy of the name, since the whole of their stay there was something less than two hours.

No men could bear so much fatigue without feeling its effects, and highwaymen, in that respect at least, were in no way different to ordinary mortals.

It is no wonder, then, that they and their horses should exhibit very perceptible signs of exhaustion.

As they penetrated still deeper and deeper into the wood, the sounds of pursuit came still more faintly to their ears.

At length they altogether died away, and then they began in good earnest to entertain the hope that they had succeeded in throwing the officers off the scent.

Had it been night instead of day their chances of ultimate escape would have been much greater, but many hours would have to elapse before darkness again covered the earth.

Presently they reached a large open space, perhaps rather more than an acre in extent, and, when near the centre, Dick suddenly wheeled round.

The others drew in immediately.

"Let us halt here a moment," he said, "and listen. It may be that the officers have, like ourselves, taken to the wood."

"All four listened eagerly, but, save the rustling of the trees and the chirping of the birds, they could hear nothing.

Not satisfied with this, however, Sixteen-String Jack slipped off his horse, and, without letting go of the reins, laid himself down at full length upon the turf.

In this way, with his ear pressing upon the ground, distant sounds would become more audible.

For full two minutes did he continue in this position, his companions during the whole of the time remaining profoundly still.

Then he rose to his feet.

"I can hear nothing," he said. "If they are in the wood at all, they must be a long way from here."

"That is a great relief, then," replied Turpin. "It would be out of the question for us to go much further."

"I am almost ready to fall from the saddle," said Tom King, "and no one would know what I have gone through during the last forty-eight hours would wonder at it."

"You are quite right there. It is to me a matter of wonder that you have kept up so well as you have," said Claude Duval. "It is what few men could have done, and to look at you no one would give you credit for so much power of endurance."

And an inspection of Tom's personal appearance would have fully borne out what his companion said.

His frame was slight, his skin soft and fair, his features delicate, yet not feminine in their character.

"A rest is imperative," cried Turpin; "our cattle require it quite as much, or even more, than ourselves. In our best course, I take it, will be to push straight on. In doing so we must inevitably emerge upon the opposite side of the wood, and, judging from the extent of it, we are not likely to run much risk in being seen by our enemies."

"It is to be hoped," said Jack, "that when we do reach the other side we shall not be long in finding some place where we can rest for a few hours."

"Forward, then," exclaimed Turpin. "Keep on in the same direction as we have done hitherto. But let me tell you it will be necessary for us to exercise the utmost care in seeking out a roof to shelter us. The deeds we have recently performed, added to the preceding ones, will create no slight commotion in the land. All will be made aware of them, and such a reward offered as will tempt people to go to any length to capture or betray us."

"Very true," said Claude Duval, "but we must have a rest somewhere. I can hold out as long as most, and I must confess I am all but overcome."

Nothing further was now said.

At an easy, gentle rate, agreeable to their horses and themselves, for now they had little fear of being pursued, they pushed through the trees.

But the wood was even greater in extent than they had at first imagined it to be, and if they had not known they had paid the greatest attention to the route they took, they would have feared that they were only wandering round and round.

In a short time, however, to their no small gratification, they began to perceive things which indicated that the confines of the wood were close at hand.

The dense undergrowth of fern and brake began to dis-

appear, and the trees were thinner in the stem, and at a greater distance from each other.

Before they quite left the protection of the wood they were very careful to reconnoitre.

But no traces of their enemies were anywhere to be seen.

It was with a feeling of great relief that they assured themselves such was really the fact.

Cautiously, then, they emerged on to a common of considerable size.

Gorse bushes were growing upon it in abundance, as well as many other dwarfish shrubs indigenous to such places.

But none of these grew high enough from the ground to in any way obstruct their view, which was unusually extensive.

What common it was they had no idea, for, to the best of their knowledge, they had never been in that part of the country before.

They skirted it for some distance, in the hope of finding some beaten path that would take them across it, nor were they disappointed in their search.

Before long they arrived at a broad track, which stretched before them in a straight line as far as ever they could see.

With little or no hesitation they took this path.

The morning was now beginning to get advanced, for their passage through the wood had taken some time.

When they entered it, it will be remembered, the sun was only a few degrees above the horizon.

Now he had attained a considerable altitude, and, for the time of year, his beams were unusually warm.

Nowhere in the sky was the thinnest cloud or mass of white vapour perceptible. All was one pure, beautiful, azure blue.

In their progress across the common the highwaymen, from time to time, took care to cast around them anxious glances to see that their foes were not approaching them.

It was but at a walk that they went, for every step they took only served to show how much exhausted they were, and how badly prepared they would have been to defend their liberties and their lives.

They were right glad when the other side of the common was reached, for their situation, while they were upon it, was by far too much exposed to please them, or make them feel exactly comfortable.

They found the path they had been pursuing made a junction with a high-road which ran through a little village, the thatched roofs and red tiles of which could be distinguished through the trees, as well as the slender spire of the church and the time-stained sails of the windmill.

It was decided not to pass through the village, as their appearance could not fail to excite a great deal of comment. It would be better, they thought, to find some isolated dwelling—a road-side public-house for instance—where they could remain for a little while.

Acting upon this belief, they left the village to their right, taking their way down a narrow, shady lane.

Where it led to they knew not, but, from its direction, they imagined it would lead them clear of the village. They entered it.

The walking pace was still continued.

Before they had proceeded many yards they heard a clattering sound by far too familiar to their ears for them to mistake it. A horseman at rather a fast trot was approaching them.

"Who is it, I wonder?" asked Dick.

"A traveller."

"Shall we stop him?"

"By no means."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Certainly. We appear to be unknown here; let us endeavour to remain so. If we were to plunder this man there would be an end of our resting anywhere about here."

"So there would, Dick, so there would. We'll just walk on quietly as we are, and allow him to pass us."

So said, so done.

The space of little more than two minutes brought the approaching horseman in sight.

He was evidently going in the same direction as themselves.

As his pace was something considerably more than double that of our friends, he soon reached them.

"Good morning!" he cried, in that cheerful, good-tempered way so noticeable in the country. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" cried our friends.

"It's a lovely morning for the time of year!" cried the traveller, slackening his pace, "is it not?"

"Very, indeed!"

He was a sturdy, healthy-looking, middle-aged man, and would have done well to have sat for the portrait of that familiar character, John Bull.

By the way in which he accommodated his speed to theirs, and attempted to enter into a conversation, it was plain he was of a talkative, sociable disposition, and delighted in making himself friendly with all he happened to meet.

Thinking it would best serve their purpose to humour him, our friends did so.

Englishmen, a hundred and thirty years ago, had then, as now, a favourite subject for conversation, and that is the weather.

As soon as the topic was exhausted, the burly man, who, by his dress and manner, appeared to be a farmer, said:

"You will excuse me, gentlemen, for saying so, but I be main curious to know where you are going, and I'll tell you why, because this here lane ain't no public road, but a private way as goes direct to my farm, and nowhere's else, as I knows on."

He turned an inquiring glance upon our friends as he spoke.

Turpin took upon himself to reply, as the others continued silent.

"You are asking what we don't know ourselves, for, to speak the plain truth, we came out this morning for a ride, and have lost our way."

"Oh, that's it, be it?" said the farmer. "Danged if I could make it out! Now, look here, you seem tired and hungry, and civil sort of gents, would you like to come to my house and have an hour's rest?"

CHAPTER CLXXI.

AFTER A BRIEF REST DICK TURPIN SETS OUT ON HIS PERILOUS EXPEDITION TO STONEBRIDGE.

"You make no mistake," replied Dick Turpin, "in saying we are hungry and tired, for we are both, and I trust you will accept our thanks for your kind offer, which we shall have very great pleasure to embrace."

Dick took off his hat as he thus spoke, and made a very low bow, in doing which he was immediately imitated by his companions.

The farmer, thinking not to be out of the fashion, took off his broad-brimmed beaver, and bowed as well.

"I'm much obliged," he said. "You see we are but plain, simple, country folks, like, and not used to Lunnon ways, and all you'll find to eat and drink is simple country fare, and—"

"There's nothing we so much admire as country fare, is there, Fitz-John?" said Turpin, addressing Sixteen-String Jack, who happened to be nearest to him.

"Nothing in the world, Clarence, nothing in the world," replied Jack.

The worthy farmer, when he heard the highwaymen address each other by such aristocratic names, at once became impressed with the idea that those whom he had so casually encountered must be persons of distinction. To be sure their appearance was not exactly the sort of thing to strengthen him in such an opinion, but he knew young bloods delighted in getting themselves into scrapes, and showing the contempt they had for the rich clothes they wore.

His desire for them to visit his house amounted to absolute frenzy, for this farmer in no way differed from most of the English agricultural classes in the reverential feeling they had for the nobility.

"This is my farm, gentlemen," he said, as they reached the end of the lane, "and, though I say it myself, a pretty one it is, and if you will only be good enough to condescend to sit down and take a meal with me, I shall feel much honoured."

"But," said Turpin, not wishing to make it appear how anxious he was to avail himself of the invitation, "we

are none of us, owing to some rather rough sport, in a condition to go anywhere."

"Oh! yes, yes," said the farmer; "don't let that stand in your way on no account."

"We are much obliged, for if we are to tell you the truth, we are sadly in want of food and rest. I don't know how it is you are willing to allow such suspicious-looking characters as we must be to enter your house, without it is owing to your superior discernment, which has enabled you to see what we actually are!"

"Gentlemen," said the farmer, who was no more insensible to skilful flattery than the rest of mankind. "Gentlemen, I hope you'll excuse me saying so much for myself, and making so bold as I do. But I flatter myself that if I can do nothing else, I can tell a real gentleman from a false one. Now, it doesn't need for me to give a second glance in order for me to see that you are real gentlemen, every one of you, and that is the reason I ventured to ask you to step in."

The farmer took out a spotted blue pocket-handkerchief as he finished this speech, and wiped his face with it; then pushing open a gate, he led the way into his own farmyard.

Our friends merely bowed in reply to his speech, and followed him.

The glance which they gave at their surroundings fully justified what the farmer had said. Neatness, order, and fruitfulness were everywhere apparent.

The bright golden autumn sun, which shed his beams upon the scene, contributed not a little to its appearance.

Half buried by an orchard, the trees in which our friends could see were literally loaded with fruit, was the farmer's homestead.

It appeared to be a long straggling building, one story high, looking very much as though some six or eight thatched cottages had been built, and then all knocked into one.

Upon a closer approach this became all the more observable, though the probability is that such was not the course adopted in building it.

The farmer observed the look of gratification which was upon the faces of his guests, and his heart warmed still more towards them.

Subduing his propensity to talk, lest by so doing he should distract their attention from some of the beauties of the place, he walked on in perfect silence.

His farm was his hobby, and he did not begrudge either time or money in improving it, and the result of his labours must have been highly satisfactory and pleasing to him.

The door of the farmhouse was soon reached.

There was a pretty old-fashioned porch over the door, and in this, although the season was so far advanced, three persons were seated, two of whom, upon hearing the farmer approach, rose and ran out to meet him.

They were two pretty, fresh-coloured country girls, and looked to be sixteen and eighteen respectively.

Upon perceiving the four strangers they drew back in confusion.

"My daughters," said the farmer, proudly, alighting from his horse as he spoke.

Our friends again bowed, and with such a courtly grace, that the hearts of the two maidens were quite won by the action.

They then proceeded to follow the farmer's example, and dismount.

The steeds were all given into the charge of a clownish-looking lad, who led them off to the stables.

Fain would our friends have accompanied him, and seen where their cattle were bestowed, but they felt they could not well do so without exciting suspicion—a thing they by no means wished to do.

So they allowed them to go, but it was with the mutual mental resolution that they would, before long, find some pretence for looking at them, and seeing exactly where they were placed.

The third person who had been sitting in the porch was the farmer's wife—a buxom dame, well worthy to be the mistress of such a spot.

The highwaymen followed the farmer into the large kitchen, where, with that cordial heartiness which is now so rarely seen, they were invited to sit down and make themselves at home.

The conversation which passed between those as-

sembled is scarcely interesting enough for us to give it in full, but we should be tempted to do so, however, it merely for the sake of character, but so many exciting and thrilling incidents press upon us for speedy recital, that we shall refrain from doing so.

Let it suffice to say, that the welcome and hospitality our friends received was of the warmest kind, and when, after the dinner had been served, the whole party sat down to the table to enjoy themselves, the happiness of the whole party was complete.

Never before had the old roof echoed to such shouts of hearty laughter as it did that day. Giving no thought of their imminent danger, and the immediate vicinity of the officers, our four friends entered fully into the spirit of the scene.

Spying his first opportunity, Dick rose from the table, and went outside.

His comrades knew his object.

Dick found the stables only a few yards distant from the house.

Well pleased was he to find that all the horses had been well fed and rubbed down.

Caressing Black Bess, as one would a favourite dog, he left the place again, for he was fearful of calling notice upon himself by remaining too long.

The stable door he found, upon examination, to have no other fastening than a latch.

Then, before entering the house again, he looked about him carefully, so as to impress the position of the different objects upon his mind, for he calculated that in all probability he would want to find his way there in the dark.

He had not forgotten the promise he had made to Joe, the ostler.

The reader must know, in fact, that Dick Turpin was not the man to make a promise and hold back from it on account of the extra danger he might, by so doing, bring upon himself.

On re-entering the kitchen, he found things looking much about the same as they did when he left.

Another tankard of the famous old October ale was brought in, and while they quaffed it they amused themselves with relating many an incident well calculated to excite both interest and laughter.

And so hours passed.

Not the slightest suspicion that they were the famous highwaymen, about whom the farmer had a great deal to say, was entertained.

At length, pleading their fatigue, they were allowed to retire.

It was then just about sunset.

As good luck would have it, the rooms in the farmhouse were so arranged that our friends were obliged to take a double-bedded room.

Nothing could have suited them better.

When they were all four within the chamber, they threw off the heavier part of their apparel, and flung themselves upon the beds, heartily grateful for the chance which had procured them such a luxury.

Their fatigue was great indeed, and in less than ten minutes they were all sound asleep, so sound that it would require no ordinary noise to awaken them.

Truly are they in a dangerous and helpless situation now.

Those officers who had pursued them would not be very long before they found they had in some way missed them.

Then they would return, and perseveringly search for the spot where they would most likely disappear.

Suppose they should get upon their track and find them—slumbering, helpless?

Then indeed would the officers have an easy prey.

Let us hope, however, that the extraordinary run of good fortune which they have at present had, may continue for yet a little longer, in order that we may follow them in their soul-stirring exploits.

Nothing, perhaps, which they have ever done, will serve so well to show the bravery of their dispositions than the readiness and ease with which they laid down and surrendered themselves to sleep at a time when they knew they were, in the strictest sense of the word, environed by danger.

May no unfriendly hand disturb them.

So far there is no indication of coming danger. Without the house all is strangely calm and still.



[DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL BINDING THE BILL STICKER TO THE GATE.]

Is it that deceptive hush which so often precedes a storm?
 We must wait and see.
 The night wears on.
 The darkness gradually increases, and the stars, one by one, peep out of the blue sky.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

TOM KING VAINLY ENDEAVOURS TO PERSUADE DICK TURPIN TO ABANDON HIS PERILOUS PROJECT.

BETWEEN four and five hours after the highwaymen had entered the bed-chamber, Dick Turpin awoke.

Hastily rising from the bed, he proceeded to attire himself with those portions of his apparel of which he had divested himself.

He took the greatest care not to make any more noise than he could possibly help.

His three companions still slumbered.

When he had laid down to sleep, it was with the reso-

lution to rise at least two hours before midnight fixed firmly in his mind.

And he had awoke.

He did not know the time exactly, but he felt pretty sure he had not overslept himself.

Watches he had in plenty, but there was no light, and no means of getting one to enable him to see the hour by any one of them.

The operation of dressing occupied but a few moments. When he was quite ready he paused and listened. All was still.

He was rather in doubt whether he should wake either of his comrades. As the reader suspects, it was his wish to go alone.

If he awoke them, he feared they would try to persuade him out of his resolution.

But, then, if he left them without their knowledge, and they should awake before he returned, the most disastrous consequences might ensue.

He resolved to wake Tom King.

This he did by shaking him slightly.

"Hist! Tom," he said. "Be silent."

"Is it danger?" asked Tom, in a voice almost below a whisper.

"No; calm yourself. There is no danger at present that I am aware of."

"Then why are you up and dressed?" asked King, sitting up on the bed.

"Be quiet, and I will tell you. I do not want to wake Claude and Jack."

"Why not? What is the matter?"

"You shall hear."

"I am all impatience."

"Do you recollect last night that I made a promise to Joe, the ostler?"

"Yes, now I do."

"Had you forgotten it?"

"For the moment."

"Do you remember what the promise exactly was?"

"Yes; that you would meet him at midnight at Stone-bridge, and place in his hands a sufficient sum of money to enable him to set up in business."

"Just so."

"But, Dick, my friend, surely, under all the circumstances you do not think of attempting to fulfil your promise?"

"No, I do not."

"I am glad of that; I was afraid you were."

"You misunderstand me, I think."

"How?"

"You said I did not think of attempting to fulfil the promise."

"I did."

"And I do not mean to attempt, but to do it!"

"But the danger?"

"It has never yet made me turn aside from my purpose, and never will."

"It is madness to think of such a project."

"Nay, I am inclined to think it less difficult than you appear to do."

"And did you think of going alone?"

"I did."

"Worse and worse."

"Why?"

"It is utter madness—I might say, suicide!"

"Pho—pho! I am sure you magnify the peril. Listen to me, Tom."

"I cannot."

"But you must."

"Am I to understand that you have fully resolved upon going?"

"I have."

"Then I give in, for I know when once you make up your mind to do a thing, no arguments in the world will turn you."

"It is so, and more especially upon the present occasion."

"Then, Dick, such being the case, you will at least grant me one favour."

"No."

"But you will."

"No. Before you speak I know well enough what the favour is. You wish to accompany me."

"That is it."

"I knew it. Tom, my friend, for the sake of my own safety, no less than your own, I must refuse."

"Why?"

"For many reasons. In the first place, the officers will be looking for us in twos or fours. By going alone I run less risk of detection."

"There is something in that."

"There is a great deal in it. Believe me, I have not decided upon this course of action without due and sufficient thought, and I am firmly convinced that it will be best in every respect to go alone."

Tom was silent.

"Do not be displeased, my friend. I awoke you in order that my disappearance should create no alarm, since you would be able to account for it."

"But how long shall you be away?"

"That is a question I cannot well answer. I hope no longer than it will take Bess to gallop from here to Stone-bridge and back."

"But we are a long way from that place, are we not?"

"We are, and yet perhaps not so far as you would imagine. I have taken accurate notice of our route, and I feel confident of being able to push across the country to my destination in a tolerably straight line."

"I am very uneasy about it, Dick," said Tom, after a brief pause. "Take my advice for once, and do not go."

"I am very sorry I cannot, but my mind is made up. Nothing ~~ever~~ yet held me back from keeping my word, and nothing shall."

"That is all very well on principle"—

"Now, Tom, don't say any more. It is quite needless, and I cannot stay to hear you. I shall try my utmost to go and come back without the people here knowing anything of it. Bess is tired, it is true, but yet I fear not she will do it."

"I shall see you go very unwillingly."

"That may be, but, Tom, as you value my friendship, do not let anything tempt you to follow me. Promise that you will not."

"I cannot refuse you, Dick, because"—

"There, never mind. You promise, do you not?"

"I do."

But Tom spoke the words very reluctantly.

"That is enough. Now let me go. I shall return all safe, do not fear. If Claude and Jack wake up before I come back, tell them where I have gone."

"I will. I know what they will say, however."

"So do I, and you need not tell me. I have been to the stable, as you know. The house, being all upon the ground floor, will be left easily, and I can make my way to the stable without any difficulty. Then I shall saddle Bess, and be off."

"It sounds very fine, Dick, but you do not think enough about the awful risk you run."

"And you think too much about it."

"Not so."

"It resolves itself into a matter of opinion, and I cannot stay to argue the matter with you. Lie down, and, if possible, sleep until I come back, for I am sure you are more in want of sleep than either of us."

"I am very weary."

"Of course you are. How could you be otherwise? As for myself, the sleep I have had has quite refreshed me, and I am ready for anything. Good-bye! I shall soon be back."

Dick cautiously and quietly opened the window as he spoke.

It was one of those old-fashioned latticed casements opening like a door, and composed of a number of tiny diamond-shaped panes of glass.

The opening made was just large enough for Dick to pass through, and no more.

The ground was about three feet below him, and he alighted without a sound.

Tom stood at the open casement.

"Shut the window, Tom," whispered Dick, "and go and lie down again, and leave me to myself. I shall come back safe, I know."

Tom did not reply, but he shook his head silently and significantly.

He did not close the window.

Dick did not stay to argue with him, but directed his steps to the stable.

The night was clear and fine, and Tom, as he stood at the window, was able to see to a considerable distance.

All presented the calmest imaginable aspect, and as he gazed out into the stillness, and saw the stars twinkling faintly overhead, he could not help asking himself whether all that had happened was not a dream, and whether there really were such persons as police-officers.

It was a strange semi-somnolent state into which he had fallen.

How long it continued he knew not, but he was aroused by hearing a slight noise.

He looked up.

In a moment he recollected all.

Then immediately after he heard a faint sound, which was to him perfectly intelligible.

A horse was trying to walk noiselessly.

"That is Bess," he said. "I trust neither she nor her rider will come to harm to-night."

Even as he uttered this aspiration, there he had been stationed appeared in sight.

Slowly and carefully Black Bess was picking her way through the tarm-yarn.

There was no moon, but yet such was the stillness and transparency of the atmosphere, that he could watch him to a great distance.

At last his form, and that of his steed, became so ill-defined that it was only by a great effort that he was able to keep his eye upon it.

He felt assured that if he once removed his glance he should never be able to fix his gaze again upon it.

Fainter and fainter they grew.

He strained his eyeballs vainly.

They disappeared.

With a heavy heart Tom closed the window, and again laid down upon the bed.

But this time, do what he could, sleep fled from him. His mind was too busily occupied in thinking of his friend, and the perils he would probably encounter.

"May he achieve his errand, which is a good one," he said, "and return in safety, but I doubt very much whether my wish will meet with a fulfilment."

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH DICK TURPIN MET JOE, THE OSTLER, AT STONEBRIDGE.

WHETHER the forebodings which haunted Tom King's mind are doomed to be realised we shall quickly see, for leaving him to his uneasy slumbers, we will follow Dick upon what it is only just to term—his temerarious expedition.

The bearings he had taken enabled him to go direct to the stable.

He pushed open the door, and a word spoken to the sagacious creature was enough to make her at once come forth.

The saddles and bridles were hanging near the door. His own he knew by the touch, for the stirrups were of a peculiar pattern.

Hastily placing it upon her back, and making all secure, he leaped into the saddle.

Then, as Tom had seen, he had walked her as gently and quietly as he could across the farm.

But no sooner was he beyond its precincts, than, uttering a cheering shout, he patted his mare upon the neck, and letting the reins fall loosely, allowed her to proceed at her own speed.

Thoroughly refreshed by her four hours' rest, Black Bess put forth that astonishing speed for which she has always been famed.

Endeavouring as much possible to go in a straight line to his destination, he paid no heed to the beaten roads. Like some wild huntsman, he scoured over the fields, leaping hedges and brooks, and not turning aside for any object.

It was a long time since Dick had enjoyed such a gallop as he then had upon the back of his bonny mare, and its exhilarating influence soon exerted itself upon him.

In the whole of his wild ride he met not a single living creature. Without any stretch of the imagination, he might have fancied himself upon an uninhabited island.

But he soon discovered that the distance from the farmhouse to Stonebridge was greater than he thought it was, and he began to grow apprehensive that he would not be in time to keep his appointment.

Although her speed was even then greater than any other horse would have made, yet he did not scruple to urge her to still greater exertion, for he knew that the full extent of her powers had not yet been reached.

On, on, over hill and dale, hedge and stream, they flew, crossing lanes and high-roads, and plunging into and swimming across those brooks which were too wide to leap.

In the darkness the two rapidly-moving figures could scarcely be distinguished; or had any one caught a transient glimpse, they would have looked like some spectral horse and rider.

And now, at last, the broad, smooth Uxbridge-road, a little above Stonebridge, was reached.

Dick paused in a field that was on one side of the road, and, ere he leaped into it, listened to assure himself that there was no hostile passenger or enemy of his within bearing.

No signs of either reached him, and feeling secure

from immediate danger, he touched Bess lightly on the flank.

It was all she needed to make her give one bound, and then alight upon the hard roadway.

Lightly and gracefully she did it, and then stood firm as a rock, in readiness to turn in any direction.

Dick turned her, of course, towards the place appointed.

"I don't know," he said, "whether I am over my time, but for all that I shall trot the remainder of the distance. Joe would not expect me to be punctual to a minute, I have no doubt. Gently, Bess, gently."

At a trot which, though it seemed an easy one, yet got over the ground in a surprising manner, the remainder of the journey was performed.

As soon as Dick saw the dim shadow of the bridge before him, he slackened his pace still more, and kept a sharp look out on both sides of him.

For a moment he turned sick at heart when he thought of the horrible position he would be in should Joe, the ostler, have after all proved treacherous, and caused an ambuscade to be laid for him somewhere about that place, but he combated this feeling as much as possible, for he thought he was doing the young man an injustice by harbouring such a thought against him.

The bridge was reached.

On arriving in the centre of it, he pulled up and waited. As he thus stood, he was even in the darkness a conspicuous object.

"If I pass this danger," he said, "I shall consider myself safe."

It was a hazardous mode of obtaining the satisfaction.

But all remained still as before.

"I am here either too soon or too late," said Dick. "I will draw aside a little while and watch."

He was rather at a loss where to conceal himself, so as to be able to see any one approach without being seen himself; but at last the thought occurred to him that if he descended by the side of the bridge to the margin of the river, he might stand there in the shadow without his presence being suspected.

No sooner did the thought occur to him, than he resolved if possible to carry it out, and accordingly he walked Bess to the end of the wall of the bridge, and made her go down the slope.

At the bottom he found a place where she could stand comfortably.

As the level of the river was only a few feet below that of the road, the archway was a very low one, and as Dick sat upon his mare, he was able to look just over the parapet.

He took care to place himself as close to the stonework as possible; then he waited.

A few minutes passed.

"No one is here," he muttered, "am I behind my time? I have a watch or two, I will try if I cannot find out what the hour is."

As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a very massive silver watch, the face of which certainly was not more than four inches in diameter.

This he held so that the greatest possible amount of light should fall upon it, but even that was not enough for his purpose.

Finding he could not see, he determined not to be balked if he could help it, so he opened the glass, and felt the position of the fingers.

In this way he was able to tell to a trifle, not accurately; he made out the time to be something less than a quarter to twelve.

"Hurrah!" he said, as he made this discovery, "then I am here first, at all. That's just what I like! Bravo, Bess, lass! There's no other steed in England, or in the world either for that matter, who could have performed the distance you have in the same space of time."

It would seem by the way in which Black Bess pawed the ground, tossed her head, and uttered a low, whinnying, neighing sound, that she was fully aware her master was speaking in her praise.

Deeming it best, however, to subside into silence, lest the tokens of his presence should reach unfriendly ears, Dick spoke to her to be silent and still.

He was immediately obeyed.

Then, assuming his former attitude, he peered over the low stone parapet of the bridge.

It was somewhere about ten minutes after this that Dick heard some one approaching at a rapid walk, and looking in the direction of the "Fox and Grapes," he almost immediately saw the outlines of a human form.

There was every probability that this was Joe, the ostler, at as a means of precaution, Dick determined not to discover himself till he had quite satisfied himself upon the point.

And now whoever it was that was coming, began to whistle in a very loud tone one of the popular melodies of the day.

Presently the figure reached the bridge.

Even as Dick had done, it walked to the centre, and there stopped.

Still Turpin did not move.

Then the figure spoke.

"I am afraid he won't come," he said, "and I don't wonder at it. He's far enough off by this time, I'll warrant. How glad I am I did not tell mother and Susan what I expected. They won't be disappointed now, as they would have been if they had known all about it, and then him not keep his word. However, it's only just twelve, and I ought not to expect him to be punctual. I'll wait an hour before I give him up."

Thus resigned, the ostler walked to the side of the bridge and sat down, determined to keep his disappointment down.

"Joe!" said Turpin.

The ostler heard the voice, and glared around him in alarm.

"Joe!" said Dick again, and this time a little louder.

"Who is it?" asked Joe, recovering himself a little; "is it the captain?"

"Yes; silence! I will be with you directly."

Joe could tell by the sound whereabouts the highwayman was, and he crossed over to that side of the bridge.

Turpin, in the meantime, turned Bess round, and regained the high-road.

"It really is the captain!" said Joe; "ah! I never thought you would come."

"But here I am, you see."

"Yes, you are here, but do you know your danger?"

"Never mind that, Joe; I made you a promise."

"I know you did."

"And I am here to perform it."

"It's a great deal more than I deserve."

"Not a bit of it! Now, Joe, how much do you want?"

"I don't know."

"But surely you have fixed upon some sum that would be just about enough for your purpose."

"Yes I have."

"And how much is it? Come, tell me."

"Two hundred pounds."

"Is that all?"

"All! I think it is a very great deal, though it may not seem much to you."

"But, Joe, don't be afraid to speak. Do you really think the sum you mention would be sufficient?"

"I do."

"Very well, I don't; and so to make sure, you shall have just double."

"Double?"

"Yes, double."

"Four?"

"Hundred pounds!"

Joe gasped for breath. The bare idea of possessing so much money was more than he could bear with anything like composure.

In the meantime, Dick very coolly began to take the money out of his pocket and count it.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

DICK IS ALARMED BY THE APPROACH OF THE PATROL, BUT JOE, THE OSTLER, SUGGESTS A CAPITAL RIDING-PLACE.

"Hold your cap, Joe," he said, "and I will put the money in it."

Joe nodded his hat in a moment.

Then Turpin, as fast as he had ten guineas counted, dropped them in.

The hat soon grew heavy.

Many and many a purse contributed the money, but Dick took care to give nothing but guineas, for he by no means desired to give the poor fellow notes, which might be recognised as having been stolen.

Upwards of three hundred and fifty guineas had he thus counted, and transferred from his pocket to Joe's hat, when a faint, muffled sound arose.

Both stopped and listened.

Louder, louder, and louder it grew.

"It is the patrol," said Joe.

"The patrol?"

"Yes, they are out to-night in double strength, so I am told, upon all the roads leading from the metropolis."

"That is awkward."

"Very."

"I am glad you told me this."

"Why?"

"Because I shall know how to act."

"I thought you were in ignorance of it."

"And why?"

"If you had known, I thought you would never have run the risk of coming here."

"I should. It is a part of my principle always to keep a promise. What I say I mean."

"But hark!" said Joe, "they are coming at a good rate. Can you hear the horses?"

"Quite plainly. Are they dragoons?"

"I do not know. I have seen three or four different parties upon the road to-night. Some were dragoons—some police-officers."

It seems as though they had made up their minds to capture us."

"They have, and unless you are very, very careful, they will do it."

"Pho, pho!"

Although the advance of the patrol could be plainly heard, owing to the silence of the night, yet they were at a great distance, and completely out of sight.

"You must be careful," said Joe, earnestly. "Until you are all captured the authorities have resolved that every road leading from London shall be thoroughly well watched, so that for you to commit a robbery will be impossible."

"But we stopped the Oxford mail last night," said Dick, with a smile.

"And a foolish thing it was, too," said Joe, "though I hope you will excuse me for making so bold as to say so."

"Why? We had a capital booty!"

"Like a dragon I have heard that every passenger was stripped of all he possessed. But you were in quite difficulty enough, I think, without making matters worse."

"Never mind that now," said Dick. "All's well that ends well. Will the patrol pass over the bridge?"

"Assuredly."

"How shall I get out of their way then?"

"I hardly know. They won't pass you without stopping and questioning you, and then, ten to one, you will be recognised."

"Perhaps not."

"There is the risk."

"Yes, of course, there is the risk."

"Then do not run it."

"But have you any idea which will be the best for me to do?"

"If you attempt to fly, you will, ten to one, be heard and pursued."

"That I should not mind in a general way, only Bess has had her powers very much taxed lately, and I do not wish to strain her by putting her to a gallop, though if I did so I should get out of the way easily enough."

"She is a wonderful animal."

"She is. Now, Joe, can you think of anything? I don't want the patrol to see me, and I do not want to put Bess to a long and fatiguing gallop. What shall I do?"

Joe scratched his head.

"That's a hard question to answer," he said.

"There is not much time to spare."

"I can only think of one thing."

"What is it?"

"I hardly like to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it is so hazardous."

"Do not hold back for that reason. Generally speaking, the greater the hazard the more I like it."

"Do you indeed?"

"I do."

"You are a strange fellow, I can hardly make you out."

"Never mind. Quick! What is your scheme?"

"You see this bridge?"

"Of course."

"Well, I think it just possible that if you were to go down by the bank, and then walk your mare under it—"

"I understand. You think, then, the patrol would pass over our heads without knowing anything of us being so near?"

"It is just likely."

"It is very likely."

"Do not be too sanguine."

"Joe, my lad, it is the best idea I have heard for some time."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do! And how it is I have never thought of it before I can't conceive. It is so simple, and yet so certain to succeed."

"You will try it, then?"

"Most certainly."

"Then come at once, or if we stay longer where we are we shall stand a chance of being seen."

"You are right; and as you must know the way about here better than myself, just be my guide for once."

"I will."

"Take hold of Bess's bridle, and lead her where she is to go."

With a gratified feeling swelling at his heart, when he thought the bold highwayman so approved of his plan, Joe took the mare by the bridle, and led her to a place where they could descend to the brink of the river without difficulty.

"How deep is the water?" asked Turpin.

"Under the arch only a little more than a foot, except in rainy weather, and the bottom is all beautiful little pebbles."

"The very thing. Bess will be able to stand there without any trouble."

"She will; but if you sit on her back you will have to stoop a great deal, for, as you see, the arch is very low."

"It is; but we can manage nicely, I think. Now, Joe, the best thing you can do is to jump up behind me. Quick! don't stop, for we have no time to lose now."

"I don't like," said Joe.

"But it won't do for you to stand in the water yourself, and if you are here alone you will rouse suspicion. Jump up."

Feeling it would be vain to remonstrate, Joe jumped up behind Dick, and then the latter, walking Bess into the water, guided her along the centre of the stream.

A faint splash as she lifted her feet out of the water alone betokened her progress, and the patrols were not yet near enough for them to hear such a sound as that.

Half-a-dozen steps, and she was fairly underneath the arch.

As Joe had said, it was necessary for them to stoop very much, but such a trifling inconvenience as that they were quite ready to put up with.

When exactly half way under, Dick stopped his mare.

The noble animal seemed fully to understand all that was going forward, and to comprehend the necessity there was for silence, for no sculptured horse could have stood more immovably than she did.

The cold water round her hoofs was doubtless disagreeable and pleasant to her.

Neither the strangely-assorted pair who sat huddled upon her back ventured to speak, for the vibration of the earth told them that the patrols were very close as hand indeed.

On, on, with a cold shiver, tramp, they came.

Under the arch the sound reached their ears, like the muttering of far off thunder.

Dick felt pretty well at ease, and did not much anticipate an attack; but still he thought it best to be on the safe side, so he drew forth his pistols, and, as well as he could, examined the priming, and put them in a condition fit for instant service.

This done, he felt more secure, and awaited the coming of his foes with great composure.

Only one thing gave him anxiety. Would the patrol ride on without stopping at the bridge?

If they did stop his position would be awkward in the extreme.

Another minute now would set his doubts and fears at rest.

He bent all his faculties to listening.

The horses came, he fancied, at a gentler pace as they neared the bridge.

But this he thought must be his fancy.

Some words that were spoken, however, showed him it was not.

No sooner had the foremost of the patrol set foot upon the bridge, than a loud and commanding voice cried out, "Halt!"

Joe clutched Dick tightly.

"Halt!" said the voice again, and then, when the tramping of the horses had ceased, all was still.

"Kemp!"

"Yes, sir."

"Come forward."

The two beneath the bridge heard some one on horseback advance out of the ranks.

"You will stay here, Kemp."

"Yes, sir."

"You understand your duty. Ride quietly up and down until you meet the other sentries. As soon as you hear anything at all suspicious, do not wait to see whether it really is so or not, but at once fire your carbine, which will be enough to bring the remainder of the force to this spot."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you understand?"

"Quite, sir."

"Forward then!" said the officer in command. "If the villains are on the road to-night, it will go hard with me if I do not capture them."

CHAPTER CLXXV.

THE SENTINEL ON THE BRIDGE PROVES A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO DICK TURPIN AND JOE.

As these words were spoken, the patrol put themselves in motion, and left the spot at a sharp trot.

Dick listened for a long time to their retreating footsteps.

He found himself in a most unenviable predicament.

There was a soldier posted as a sentinel just above his head, with the strictest injunction to raise an alarm if he heard the least suspicious sound.

He was in the water under the bridge.

That he would be able to walk Bess out without attracting the sentinel's attention was scarcely to be hoped for.

What was he to do?

He was in a serious dilemma.

Joe wished to speak, but did not dare to do so. He sat mute and still behind the highwayman.

The sentinel, whose name appeared to be Kemp, remained for some time just where he was, looking after the receding forms of his companions.

Then Dick heard him say something to himself, which showed that he was not in the very best of tempers.

"Hang this sort of work!" he said; "it's a scamping game, that it is, to set soldiers to do police duty! Curse the highwaymen! I only hope I come across them, and see if I don't settle them pretty quick. A nice treat or a cold winter's night to patrol up and down a lonely road like this. However, I s'pose it's no good grumbling; I'll try again and abide by it."

Having come to this philosophical conclusion, Kemp slowly walked his horse up towards the "Box as Grapes."

It now became rather an interesting point for Dick to ascertain how far his best extended, and whether, when he reached its utmost limit, it would afford him an opportunity of slipping out unperceived.

The pace at which this patrol went along the road was a very leisurely one, and it was some time before he got far enough off for Dick to be able to speak in safety.

As soon, however, as he had done so, he said—

"Well, Joe, what's to be done now?"

"You may well ask that," said Joe; "we are in a awful fix; you see what comes of taking my advice."

"Your advice was good enough, if these confounded patrols were not so vigilant. Who would have thought, now, they would have taken the trouble to post sentinels in that manner?"

"Who, indeed?"

"Hark! Can you hear him?"

"Not now."

"Nor I. How far do you think he will go before he turns back?"

"Not very far, I should think."

"Well, Joe, I'll tell you what I wish you to do."

"I'll do it."

"I know you will. As we cannot hear the patrol, he will not be able to hear you if you slip off the mare's back, and go under the arch as quietly as you can, and creep up the bank."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"Find out how far he goes, if you can, and whether it would be safe for me to come out."

"I wished to propose the same thing to you."

"Did you?"

"Yes, only I was afraid you would misunderstand me."

"Well, no matter about that. Slip off, and knowing the place as well as about that, you will easily be able to gain the high-road. Then note how far he goes."

"All right," said Joe; "I'm off."

As he spoke he dismounted.

The water reached half-way up to his knees, but he did not care for that.

Feeling the sides of the arch with his hands, he crept along stealthily, and was soon at the top of the bank.

Here he crouched down, and took a long look up and down the road.

The sentinel was quite out of sight, and it was only indistinctly that he could hear the beat of his horse's hoofs.

Whether he was approaching or receding he could scarcely tell, for the sound did not seem to grow louder or fainter.

But this was owing to the distance, and the slow rate at which the patrol went.

The sound began to increase in loudness.

"He's coming back," said Joe, as he crouched still closer to the earth.

And now he was rather puzzled.

The officer, he felt sure, had gone towards the "Fox and Grapes."

And yet, as the sound got plainer and plainer, he felt confident it came from the opposite direction.

He waited, watching and listening.

The horseman who was coming must be either a traveller or another patrol.

By the speed he judged it to be the latter.

Nor was he wrong; for presently, through the darkness, he could distinguish a military-looking form on horse-back.

It rode right up to the bridge, waited a moment, then turned round and retraced his steps.

"Ah!" said Joe, as he slid down the bank towards the stream, "I see it all now."

"What have you learned?" asked Turpin, anxiously, as soon as he was within hearing.

"Hush," said Joe.

"Will it be safe for me to emerge?"

"Listen, and I will tell you what I have seen."

"Go on, then, I am impatient to leave this place."

"I don't doubt that," said Joe. "It's nice and cool in the summer, I should think."

"How far does the sentry go?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Not matter?"

"No, there are two of them, and their beats are arranged, that when one is furthest from the bridge the other is upon it, and the reverse."

"Confound their caution!"

"So say I."

"Then, don't you think they go far enough for me to be able to get out unheard?"

"I should think you would stand a bit of a chance if you were to wait until they were both halfway."

"I see, both about the same distance from the bridge."

"Just so."

"Then, with care, you think I might do it?"

"It is your only chance."

"It shall be tried, then, and it won't be my fault, now Bess's either, if it does not succeed."

"Now's your time, then. I'll walk out with you, and I only hope you'll get off all right, as you deserve to do."

"Stop that, Joe. If you want to offend me, just begin praising me. Lead the way out of this place."

"Quietly, quietly, or you will spoil all."

Joe again took Black Bess by the bridle, and led her along.

They quickly emerged, and then Dick stopped to listen. He could hear one of the sentinels approaching at a brisk walk.

"Good-bye, Joe," he said. "Take care of yourself. I shall get across the country as quickly as I can, and I am glad I came to-night, for I have acquired some information very important to me, and which I could not otherwise have got. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Joe, "and to the longest day I live I shall feel grateful to you."

At this moment they saw a bright flash as of lightning, and then heard the loud report of a carbine.

"We are seen," said Dick. "Fly, Joe, and I will do the same. They will find it no small task to catch me, I'm thinking."

So saying, he struck Bess upon the flanks with his heels, which caused her to give one terrific bound, and then dart forward with incredible speed.

The shot which had been fired was speedily answered by another, and then the tramping of horses at full gallop followed.

"Hurrah!" said Dick, as Bess leaped a hedge that most horses would have turned away from, "hurrah! Let them follow us; we will lead them a rare dance to-night."

That he had been perceived by one of the sentinels seemed tolerably certain, for he now heard most unequivocal signs of pursuit.

But he felt he could well afford to laugh such efforts to scorn now that he had got so good a start.

One bold effort he determined should free him from them, and so, urging Bess to the utmost exertion, he flew along with the swiftness of the wind.

Very soon all sounds of his pursuers died away.

Then he drew rein, and went at a pace less fatiguing to himself and to his noble mare. Impatient as he was to reach the farm, where his friends were doubtless as impatiently awaiting him, he would not satisfy that feeling at her expense.

But the long, sweeping, easy gallop which she went at, and which she could perform with the greatest ease, carried him over the ground at a very swift pace indeed.

As near as possible, he took the same route back as that by which he came.

How late it was he had no idea, but there were no signs of daybreak visible in the sky, and he yet entertained the hope of being able to reach his destination before the farmer or any of his family were astir.

At last the comfortable-looking place came in sight.

Here he pulled up, and returned with the same caution as he had left.

As he crossed the yard near the stable he looked towards the window of the room in which his companions were.

It was open.

Within he could see a face, while a hand was waved towards him.

"That's Tom King," he said; "he is a true friend, and deeply grateful for the service I have rendered him. It will cut me to the heart to ever part with him, and so it will to part with you, my lass," he added, patting Black Bess upon the neck.

Then, having arrived at the stable door, he alighted, took off the saddle and bridle, replaced them on the nail from which he had taken them, and sent the mare to find her own way to her stall, which he felt sure she would be better able to do than himself.

Then closing the stable-door, he made his way to his chamber.

"Thank God," said Tom King, "you have returned safely. A thousand times, as the night wore on and you did not return, have I been tempted to set out in pursuit of you, and nothing but the promise I made you would have been sufficient to keep me back."

"It is as well you made it," said Turpin. "All has passed off right enough. I must give you the particulars another time. Has neither Claudenor Jack awoke?"

"No."

"Let us lie down, then," said Turpin, "and while we have the chance get all the sleep we can."

CHAPTER CLXXV.

NICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS HAVE THEIR SERENITY DISTURBED BY THE APPEARANCE OF A BILL-STICKER.

THE sun was high up in the sky before our friends awoke. The inmates of the farm would not have them disturbed on any account.

As for the farmer himself, he was delighted, and nothing would have pleased him better than for his strange guests to have stayed with him for a month.

That they were gentlemen he was confident.

Tom King, too, had succeeded in making a favourable impression upon both his daughters, and the reader will scarcely feel surprised at this.

Upon awaking, they took all the pains with their toilette which they possibly could, and by the aid of clean water and a brush they much improved their personal appearance.

The wound which Sixteen-String Jack had received from the coachman was so slight as to be scarcely worth talking about. There was a long ugly scratch along his cheek and ear, but it did not look like what it really was, but as though he had been torn by a briar.

On his night adventure Dick did not say a word, for he resolved to defer the narration of what had taken place to a better opportunity.

All four felt pretty sure the officers must have lost the clue to their whereabouts, or they would have heard something of them before now.

On leaving the chamber where they had passed the night, they repaired to the kitchen where so many happy hours had been spent the day before.

There they found assembled, and apparently waiting for them, the honest old farmer himself, his wife, and his two daughters.

The favourable impression which our adventurers had made was deepened considerably by the improvement visible. They did, indeed, look like gentlemen, and Tom King more especially, who, as the reader already knows, was one both by birth and education.

A substantial meal was spread upon the table, and, take the apartment for all in all, it would have been difficult to find a place that had so many evidences of comfort about it.

The air, unlike that of the previous day, was raw and chilly, so a large fire had been heaped up in the spacious fire-place.

The flames were high and bright, and cast a cheerful glow upon the faces of those who sat around, as well as on the walls and rafters.

Dick thought, as he looked around, he had never before seen such a picture of content, and he could not help contrasting the placid life of the inmates of the farm, undisturbed as it was with any remarkable incident, and his own wild, turbulent career, full of wild and soul-stirring excitement. The one was like the unruffled waters of a lake, the other like the mountain torrent.

During the meal, which was as happy and as jovial as one as that on the preceding day, no one, to have looked at the four highwaymen, and noticed the careless, happy expression of their countenances, would have thought that so heavy a price was set upon their heads, and that the officers of justice were straining every nerve to effect their capture.

Of the jests, the merry tales, the jokes, the laughter, we shall say but little. The episode of their stay at the farm, because is too dull and devoid of interest for us to linger over its details.

But as our aim is to give the real lives of these four notorious characters, we could not pass it over without making mention of it.

There was no wish that the highwaymen should leave the farmer's roof; in fact, they were pressed to stay, and

our friends would doubtless have accepted the invitation, from the fact of its affording them a secure and unsuspected hiding-place, had it not been for an untoward incident.

Scarcely had they finished the hearty breakfast laid before them, and in which the farmer and his wife joined, out of compliment to their visitors, than a strange step was heard outside.

Our friends judged it was a strange step, for the dog, which had been lying in front of the fire, arose and uttered a low, fierce growl.

"Down, Rover! down!" cried the farmer, then turning to his daughters, he added, "go to the door, Alice, and see who it is."

In obedience to this request, the elder of the two sisters went to the door and opened it.

"Good morning, miss!" said a voice. "I'll just trouble you to take that, and, if you'll allow me, I'll stick one or two about the farm."

"What is it?"

"It's a bill, miss, offering a reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for the apprehension and conviction of those four desperate highwaymen, Dick Turpin, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, who are supposed to be hiding somewhere in this neighbourhood."

It would be impossible to describe in any reasonable space the effect which this speech had upon our friends.

But the emotion they showed was not for a moment attributed to its real cause. It was thought to be merely the surprise which the sudden intelligence had elicited.

The farmer got up off his chair and went to the door.

"Good morning!" said the man, who, by the implements he carried, was evidently a bill-sticker. "Good morning!"

"Good morning!" replied the farmer. "What's that you say about highwaymen?"

"Here's a bill offering a reward of two thousand five hundred pounds for their apprehension, and containing a full and accurate description of their appearance."

"Oh! indeed!"

"They are thought to be in hiding somewhere in this part of the country, so I want you to give me permission to stick a few of the bills round the farm."

"Oh! certainly—certainly! stick up as many as you like! I only hope they'll be caught, for, rat 'em, they robbed me once of my money as I was coming home from market!"

"Did they, though!"

"Yes, they did."

"Then you needn't fear they'll do it again, for such steps are taken as will make their capture certain; they cannot escape, and every road is guarded."

"Glad to hear it!" said the farmer. "Glad to hear it! Where's the bill you spoke about? Oh! there it is! Alice has got it! But come, you seem a civil sort of chap, will you walk in and warm you, and have a jug of ale?"

"Thank you! if you will?" said the bill-sticker, putting down his can. "It's an awfully cold morning, and I am chilled to the bone!"

"I daresay you are. Come in—come in!"

The bill-sticker entered.

The highwaymen felt very uncomfortable indeed, but what were they to do?

Move they could not, without exciting suspicion, and so they were obliged to remain where they were and stand their chance of being unrecognised.

The bill-sticker was a thin, sharp, active-looking, little man, with a very inquisitive cast of countenance, and ferret-like eyes, which glanced over everything in the place in a moment.

A chair was placed for him near the fire, and a large mug of ale poured out.

"Drink that," said the farmer, heartily, as he handed it to him, and if that don't warm you, nothing will."

"Many thanks, and good health to you all," said the bill-sticker, as he took the proffered mug and drank off its contents; but all the time he did so, he fixed his eyes upon our friends with the greatest attention.

Of course they noticed it, and knew what was the reason.

But their entertainers thought it was only rude curiosity on the man's part, for so impressed were they with the idea that their guests were gentlemen, that the fact of their being four of them did not rouse their suspicions.

The farmer had taken up the bill, and was looking earnestly at it, but to read the document was beyond his power.

He saw the figures on the top, £2,500, and, by dint of spelling every letter, he made out the word "Reward."

"I say," he cried. "Just let us hear what the bill says. Now, Mr. Bill-sticker, read it out to the company."

"Oh! certainly. Just hand it to me."

"Excuse us," said Dick, bending forward and speaking in a low tone to the farmer, "but while you listen to this we should like to run out and look at our cattle; they are valuable creatures, and we always make a point of looking at them the first thing every morning."

"No—no, never mind now. Stop and hear the description read."

"It is not worth a mile—we shall not be long away, and I thought if we went while you were listening to that, we should not be missed so much."

"Oh! very well—very well," said the farmer. "But don't be long gone. I shall be main sorry to part with you."

Dick upon this rose, and made a sign to his companions to do likewise.

The bill sticker looked after them suspiciously, but he did not like to speak, for fear of falling into some ridiculous mistake.

All four of our friends could not help giving a sigh of relief upon finding themselves in the open air.

"Game's up," said Turpin. "That man suspects who we are. I saw it in his eyes. Quick to the stable with you, and then we will mount and be off."

"That's the plan," said the others, as they followed him. "Confound the fellow for coming and turning us out of such comfortable quarters."

"So say I," replied Dick. "Only let me catch him, and see whether I don't pay him out."

They laughed.

Dick pushed open the stable door, and then, entering, each one set about the task of getting the horses ready for the road.

They were saddled in an incredibly short space of time, and then led out.

"Mount," said Dick, "and let us be off—unseen, if we can, or that bill-sticking rascal will raise such an outcry as will alarm the whole country-side."

Scarcely had the words left his lips, and before they had fixed themselves in their saddles, than, with a sudden rush, the bill-sticker and the farmer ran out of the house.

"Murder," they cried. "Stop them! Highwaymen! Stop them! Two thousand five hundred pounds reward! Stop them! Stop them! Oh! murder! Fire!"

CHAPTER CLXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL FIND ANOTHER BILL-STICKER IN THE LANE, AND TAKE THEIR REVENGE UPON HIM.

DICK TURPIN thrust his right foot into the stirrup, and then, gathering the reins in his left hand, he raised his hat and made an ironical kind of bow.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "You see we are off, and rather suddenly. But it can't be helped. I'm sorry to leave you. Good bye."

As he thus spoke he touched Black Bess lightly on the flanks, and she darted off at once.

The others followed.

The vociferations of the farmer and the bill-sticker soon died away. To be sure they ran as fast as their legs would carry them, shouting as they went at the top of their voices, but they were no match for the highwaymen's horses.

"I should like to smother that fellow in paste," said Claude Duval, as they walked their horses up a bit of a hill. "Confound him for coming and turning us out of such comfortable quarters. I don't know when I was so happy before."

"Oh! never heed that," said Jack. "I for one had quite enough of it, though I must say I shall always look up to the old farmer as one of the right sort."

"It's that infernal bill-sticker," said Turpin. "I only hope we fall across him, and I'll make him remember us for one while."

"What do you intend to do next, Dick?"

"We ought to reflect a little before we act, I think."

"I am sure we ought."

"We have pretty good evidence that all the roads round London are pretty well watched, and I will give you an idea how it is done."

Dick then proceeded to relate to his friends the adventures he had had during the night. Their astonishment may be imagined, for Claude and Jack never knew that he had been absent from the chamber.

But, despite their recklessness, they could not help feeling rather uneasy at the extreme vigilance of their foes. They could no longer conceal from themselves that they were in real earnest.

"I think," said Tom King, "that the very best thing we can do is to leave London for a while, and bend our steps inland. We have never visited the midland counties yet. What do you say to doing so?"

"Say!" cried the others; "that no better plan of action can be proposed."

"Since we are so unanimous, then," said Turpin, "we had better start at once. That we are more than suspected to be in this part of the country we have abundant evidence, and for that reason it strikes me we shall have a great deal of difficulty in leaving it undetected."

"We must expect that; but we have got out of worse difficulties before now, and I trust we shall again."

"And now where are we?"

"I have no idea."

"Which direction, then, ought we to take to go where you propose?"

"There is only one way. It is about noon now, I should think."

"Just ten minutes' past," said Dick, consulting a watch.

"Very good, then; the sun is somewhere about due south, so the simplest plan will be to go straight on and keep our backs to it."

"We shall do, then; but mind, above all, you keep a sharp look round."

"What's that, then?" cried Claude. "Do you see?"

"Where?"

"Further on down the lane."

"I see nothing," said Dick.

"Look at that large tree yonder. Can't you see something close to it moving about?"

"Yes I can," cried Tom King. "It is a piece of stick moving about."

"I see it now," said Turpin. "Halt a moment, and let us try if we cannot make out what it is."

"It looks to me," said Claude, "as though somebody was standing in the lane, and poking the trunk of the tree with a walking-stick."

"But what on earth can they be doing that for?"

"I don't know."

"There doesn't look anything dangerous in it."

"There does not, and yet there might be. We must now look with an eye of distrust upon everything we cannot understand."

"Let us walk on gently and see what it is, and be prepared, if necessary, to defend ourselves."

The lane down which our friends were now travelling was a very winding one, with good high hedges on both sides of it.

It was round the first bend in it that this strange sight was seen.

At a walking pace, and looking very keenly about them, they went on.

As soon as they passed the curve, the mystery explained itself.

A man, armed with sticks and brushes, was pasting bills upon the trunks of such trees as were wide enough for the purpose.

"Another bill-sticker, by Jove!" said Turpin; "curse all the tribe. Why, if they go on at this rate, we shall be made known everywhere! Let us alight, Claude; we'll serve this one out, at all events."

So saying, Dick dismounted, and his example was immediately followed by his three companions.

"But what shall we do with the horses?"

"I will hold them, if you like. They will be safest if I do, and you three are surely a match for that fellow!"

"Oh! yes."

Sixteen-String Jack immediately took charge of the horses.

This care off their minds, the others walked steadily down the lane.



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS DISCOVER THE DESERTER EXHAUSTED ON THE WAYSIDE.]

The man was so intent upon what he was about that he did not perceive their approach.

He had just got a refractory bill to stick against the bark of the tree, and he was patting it down at the sides and corners, in order to make it secure.

Dick would not speak to disturb him, but made a sign with his hand to Claude.

The two then crept forward on tip-toe, until they were close to the man, who little suspected who were behind him.

Then they gave a sudden dart forward, and caught him by the arms.

The bill-passer uttered a cry of tright upon feeling himself seized thus unexpectedly, and he twisted his head round in order to see who his assailants were.

Familiar as he had made himself with the description given on the bills, he recognised our two friends at a glance.

"Murder!" he cried. "Help! Save me! Oh! Lor'!"

Two thousand five hundred pounds! Oh! murder! Fire!"

"Stop that!" said Dick, and as he spoke, he snatched up the paste-brush, and sent it with a dab into the man's face.

Of course, it became an impossibility for him to continue his outcries any longer, for the brush was well charged with paste, and it filled up his mouth completely.

He managed, however, to make a terrible spluttering.

"Villain!" said Claude Duval; "what do you mean? Answer us this moment, what do you mean?"

The bill-sticker made an effort to speak, but, as he did not seem to relish swallowing his own paste, it was an ineffectual one.

"Oh! you won't speak," said Claude; "then we will have our revenge upon you. We have sworn not to leave a single bill-sticker alive, and you have fallen into our hands."

An expression of the most absolute fright came over the

face of the unfortunate man, and his hair fairly bristled up and stood on end.

In a spasmodic sort of way he managed to gasp for mercy.

"It's no use," said Dick, who at the same time made an expressive motion to his friend, which he perfectly understood.

There was a five-barred gate close by, opening into a field, and Claude immediately divined Dick wished him to be tied to it; for though they strove to frighten the man by threats, they had never for a moment entertained the idea of doing him any serious or wanton injury.

The bill-sticker himself, however, was not aware of this, and when he felt himself being forced backwards to the gate, he did not know what he had to dread.

"Here, Tom," cried Dick, "while we hold him, just feel in this fellow's pockets, and find whether he has anything about him in the shape of rope ties will do to hang him with."

"All right!" said Tom King, interrupting himself in his occupation of reading the bill which had been stuck upon the tree. "I'll do it."

In a very scientific manner, Tom proceeded to rifle the man's pockets, and he very soon had the whole of their miscellaneous contents strewed upon the ground.

Among the rest were several pieces of very strong twine. "These will do," said Turpin. "Now, Claude!"

Both set to work to tie the man to the gate, and this they did in a very little while. The cord they had was not quite enough, nor was it so thick as they would have liked for their purpose; but they made the best shift with it that they could.

There was a piece of leather strap that was fastened to the paste-can, and made so as to slip over the shoulder.

This they took, and formed one excellent band with it.

In brief, between them, by dint of a great deal of rummaging, they found a sufficient quantity for their purpose; and at length they had the hapless bill-sticker tied firmly to the gate, and quite powerless to help himself.

"Now, villain!" cried Dick, "you will remain where you are until such time as some one comes along this lane and releases you; and as it appears to me to be rather an unfrequented one, you will, I expect, have to wait for some time."

The bill-sticker had got rid of the brush out of his mouth, and he set up a dismal howl.

"Silence! Oh! you won't! Then take that!"

Dab went the brush into his mouth again, almost choking him with paste.

As it was stuck quite firmly between his jaws, and, as he had no use in his hands, he would have some difficulty in getting rid of it.

Quite satisfied with what they had done so far, their next proceeding was to take possession of the packet of bills the man carried with him, and also to pull down the one that was stuck against the tree.

They then formed the whole into a loose pile, and Dick, taking some phosphorous matches from his pocket, set light to it in several places.

Then a bright flame shot up, and in a little while all of them were consumed.

CHAPTER CLXXVIII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE NOT DESTINED TO GO FAR ON THEIR INTENDED JOURNEY WITHOUT MEETING WITH AN INTERRUPTION.

THE poor bill-sticker looked with a rueful eye upon these proceedings on the part of the highwaymen.

To think that he should be able to see two thousand five hundred pounds—for in that light he looked upon our friends—right before his nose, and yet not able to take it, almost drove him to distraction.

"So far very good," said Turpin, as he poked about the ashes of the bills, to see that none was left unburnt.

"Put his cap on," cried Sixteen-String Jack, who had been an amused spectator of the scene. "Poor fellow! he'll catch cold. Put his cap on."

"All right," said Claude, who divined the meaning that lurked beneath his comrade's words.

Stepping down, he picked up the can in which the paste was carried.

A good portion of its contents was spilt upon the road

way, but yet there remained the more glutinous part of it, which clung tightly to the sides and bottom.

All saw now what Jack meant.

A shout of laughter came from their lips when Claude, holding it up as high as he could, reversed it and brought it down upon the man's head.

It was large enough to go right over it, and the rim rested upon his shoulders.

He looked about the most ludicrous object imaginable.

The tin can looked like some remarkable helmet.

"Now let us be off," said Dick. "We have done quite enough to make him remember us to the longest day of his life, and the sooner we move away the better. It won't do for us to stay too long in one place."

"Come on, then; we have certainly put a stop to his exertions—for a little while, at least."

"I wish he represented all his tribe."

"No doubt."

The four highwaymen remounted their steeds, and, after casting one last look at their enemy, resumed their way.

But they went at an easy pace, for it was obviously their best policy to husband their horses' strength as much as possible, whenever they had an opportunity, in order that when a time arrived which rendered it necessary for them to make great exertion, they might be equal to doing it.

"I cannot see any signs or sounds of pursuit," said Dick. "Can you?"

"None whatever."

"It is too much to hope that we have altogether eluded our pursuers. They are off our track now, but there is no knowing how soon they may be on it again."

"There is not."

"Both ourselves and our cattle have had a long, good rest, and, if we do not suddenly fatigue them, they will be able to take us a considerable distance without requiring another halt, and you know whenever we make one some fresh danger is pretty sure to arise."

"True."

"I suppose we still keep to our intention of seeking the midland counties, and trying if we cannot make ourselves snug there for some time?"

"Oh! yes—yes."

"We are all agreed upon that, then, which is sufficient for the present."

The lane, after a few more capricious convolutions, terminated in a broad high-road.

They did not know for certain, but, from its position, they judged it to be the one leading direct to Warwick.

If this should turn out so, their future progress would be easy.

And so, without any incident worthy of recording, they travelled this road until close upon sunset.

They had passed and met many vehicles and people, and from the latter they had received a great deal of scrutiny, but they did not offer to interfere with our friends, and our friends did not offer to interfere with them.

It was, then, just as the sun was about to set, that they noticed on the road before them a tremendous cloud of dust.

"That is a stage coach, I'll be bound," said Turpin, after looking for a few moments.

"It looks like it."

"It does."

"But, Dick," said Claude.

"What?"

"You do not think of stopping it?"

"No, I cannot say that I do."

"I am glad of that."

"Why?"

"Because it appears to me our presence on this road is at present unsuspected, and such being the case"—

"You think it would be injudicious to do anything that would serve to put the grab upon our track."

"I do."

"And so do I. Nevertheless, I hope it will prove to be a stage coach."

"Why?"

"We shall then know whether we really are upon the road to Warwick. I have not much doubt upon the subject, but still I should like to feel quite sure."

"I can say nothing against that."

"Oh! no. We will ride by quietly, and then we shall create neither suspicion nor alarm."

"Good."

In accordance with this, our friends crotted quietly along.

They did not go all four in a body, but in twos.

Turpin and King first.

Claude Duval and Jack Rann a little in the rear.

The stage coach came bowling along in capital style, and in a very short time they were able to distinguish the driver and the passengers on the top.

The sun was then just setting behind a large black cloud upon the very verge of the western horizon, and his last bright red beams fell with full force upon the approaching vehicle.

It was a beautiful sight, and one that might well call forth the admiration of any one.

But, ardent and enthusiastic as our friends were over horses, it gave them especial delight.

In fact, so charmed were they, that they forgot all else, and reined in their steeds to look, shading the sun from their eyes with their hands as they did so.

The driver, seeing this, and having heard of the stoppage of the Oxford coach, felt just in the least degree apprehensive when he saw our travellers, and he drew a long breath when he found he was allowed to pass unmolested.

It was more than he anticipated.

"All right," said Dick. "That was the Warwick mail. We shall have now no further trouble about our route; all we shall have to do will be to keep straight on."

As he spoke, the sun sunk completely behind the cloud.

A sudden darkness seemed to overspread the face of nature, and a chill blast of wind made the denuded branches of the trees clash lightly against each other.

Evening deepened into night, and when the moon arose, which she did with an almost full face, our friends were a considerable distance from London.

From having met with no molestation, they began to indulge in the hope that they had got beyond the range of the dragons.

Such being the case, it was clearly their best policy to push on as quietly as they could, taking care to do nothing calculated to call attention to their whereabouts.

While they adhered to this, their progress through the country can afford but little matter for incident.

It was, however, something past ten o'clock when, in spite of themselves, they had about the strangest adventure they had ever met with, and which, in its results, had a material effect upon their future course of action.

What that adventure was we shall now proceed to relate.

The horses having been so long upon the road without once stopping to rest, began to evince signs of weariness, and the highwaymen themselves were somewhat cramped and stiff, by remaining so long in one position.

It was, therefore, thought advisable to come to a halt for a little time.

There were no dwellings anywhere near. Nothing but wide open country.

Nor could they see in the distance anything that looked as if they were approaching a village or town.

But on either side of them were some very verdant meadows, screened from the high-road by a hedge many feet in height.

In one of these they determined to stay awhile, and perceiving a gate at their left hand, they opened it and passed through.

The meadow was one of great extent.

Getting as close to the hedge as they could, our four friends dismounted, and, holding the reins in their hands, laid down to rest awhile.

But though the hedge was high, they were fearful that their horses would be seen if they stood up as they were.

But how were they to get them to lie down?

That was a question.

In past times Dick had taught his mare, Black Bess, to lie down, and he had little fear that she would obey him now.

He resolved to try, for then, they thought, and reasonably enough, that they might induce the other three to follow her example.

Accordingly Dick rose, and patting her on the neck bade her lie down.

At the same time that he uttered this command, he pressed against her shoulder.

The gentle creature understood him, and, bending her knees, lay down upon her side.

As they expected, this being done before the other horses, they were able to make them lie down also.

While they remained in this position it was a matter of impossibility for them to be seen from the high-road by any one.

In order to keep their horses thus, they were obliged to keep hold of the reins, and lie down close beside them.

But the creatures were too tired to be restless, and they lay there cropping the short sweet grass in silence.

As the bright moon shone down upon them they looked exceedingly picturesque.

The rest did them all good. Those only who have sat for as many hours in the saddle as our friends had without alighting, can tell how fatiguing it is, and how welcome a change, no matter of what sort, always is.

Half-an-hour, perhaps, passed, and during the whole of that time they had not been disturbed by the passing of a single thing along the high-road, but now a faint sound reaches their ears, which showed them that they on that night were not alone upon the road, as they thought they were.

CHAPTER CLXXIX.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ARE UNSUSPECTED WITNESSES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY INCIDENT.

"THEY are horsemen," said Claude Duval, as he raised himself upon his elbow, in order to hear more plainly.

"They are horsemen, and well mounted."

"You are right, and, not only that, they appear to be in force. I should think there must be six of them, at least."

"Listen!"

There was a silence of some minutes' duration, during which all four of the highwaymen listened eagerly and earnestly.

The sound, which had at first been so faint as scarcely to be distinguished, and so equivocal that none but the most practised ear could have told what it really was, now grew more and more distinct, until, in a short time, the peculiar clattering noise which horses' hoofs make when striking upon the hard road, was plainly heard.

"Are they our foes?" asked Tom.

"Very likely, I think," replied Turpin.

"They have got upon our track in some way or other, you may depend."

"If so, then, it is obviously our best course of action to remain where we are."

"Certainly."

"They will pass us, to be sure," said Turpin; "but then, you must recollect, we shall have the disadvantage of their being on the road before us."

"Yes, that's true enough."

"Still, better that, I think, than have them at our heels; but we are by no means certain that they are officers. It may be, they have nothing at all to do with us."

"Yes, it may be so; but it is not very likely, I think."

However, we must be unanimous in one thing.

"What is that?"

"Why, that under all circumstances, the best thing we can do is to remain quite still while they pass, let them be who they may."

"Oh! yes."

"So far well, then. The horses seem quiet, and I should think we might venture to leave them, while we crawl yet closer to the hedge. The moon is shining, and we shall be able to see everything on the road as plainly as if by daylight."

"So we shall, and, by so doing, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing who they are, and whether they are in pursuit of us or not."

"Just so."

"Come on, then, and lie down. The hedge does not grow too close together for us not to be able to see through it, and, though a slight sound would not reach their ears, still it will be safest to take up our positions at once, so that, when they do reach this spot, we shall have no necessity to move in the slightest."

"There spoke Claude Duval," said Dick Turpin. "Ever

cautious, never running into danger if he could possibly avoid it."

"Never mind that now, Dick. Take up your position so that you can see plainly all that passes, and we will all do the like. Quick, they will be here directly."

And, in truth, it seemed as though the little troop of horsemen was very close at hand indeed, but at present they were further off than our friends exactly imagined. The intense silence was so deceptive.

Tramp—tramp—tramp they came.

Our friends' excitement and impatience rose to its highest pitch, and they crept forward as far as they were able.

The moon was high up in the sky, and lighted up the road with great brightness.

From where they were, however, they were bound to have a capital view of whatever went by.

On they came, at the same regular, steady trot.

At last they came in sight.

They were not police-officers.

One glance was enough to assure our friends of that.

Nor were they their more dreaded foes, the light dragons, who had kept hitherto so pertinaciously upon their track.

But, to the unbounded astonishment of the highwaymen, these men, who were well armed and mounted, pulled up exactly before the spot where they lay concealed.

It looked, indeed, just as though they knew the precise spot where they were.

But this was only fancy, and the idea was disappointed almost as soon as it had formed itself in their brains.

And now our friends, with a feeling of the greatest possible curiosity, lay profoundly still, just as they were, for, having halted, the least sound would be heard by the horsemen in the road.

For themselves they had no fear, but they could not for long be answerable for their horses.

Why the troop had halted just where they did they could not conceive, and the peculiar situation in which they were placed, made them fear that it boded no good to them.

"This place will do as well as any, I fancy," said an authoritative voice, "if you are sure he will pass here."

"We are quite sure of that."

"Then get behind the hedge and wait."

Our friends considered discovery certain, but they had sufficient discretion not to make the slightest movement.

It was very strange that these persons, whoever they might be, should think of concealing themselves where the highwaymen had.

It was one of those extraordinary coincidences that will sometimes occur.

It was a fortunate thing our friends did not move and betray their hiding-place, for it so happened that they chose the opposite side of the road, where there was a gap in the hedge.

Through this they, one after another, made their way, and, so far as the highwaymen could tell, dismounted from their steeds, and disposed themselves much in the same manner as they had done.

That they were waiting for some one, their action, and the few words they had let fall, pretty clearly evidenced, and who it they were waited for, and why they waited for him, they were full of curiosity to know.

They were each full of thought, and would have longed to have conversed, but they deemed it would be imprudent.

Those in the hedge, or, rather, behind it, no doubt were fully of opinion that they had the place all to themselves, and the chance circumstance of any one else lying in wait at the same place, never once struck them.

The result of this strange combination of incidents will be quickly apparent, for, as the highwaymen listen, they begin to hear the sounds of an approaching horseman.

On—he came, and that at a most rattling pace. His horse, indeed, was going at full gallop.

The manner in which the hoofs struck upon the ground told this.

It was only fair to suppose that the six men behind the opposite hedge heard the same sounds that our friends did, but there was no movement of theirs made to indicate it.

On came the horseman, and, the nearer he came, the greater grew the highwaymen's suspense.

There was a vague feeling in their minds that something terrible was going to happen, but, beyond that feeling, they had no idea that they could reduce to anything like consistency and form.

Whether the ambush boded any danger to the coming traveller they had no means of knowing, nor the special shape which the danger might assume, and, even if they had, they would not have been able to have apprized him of it.

At length he came in sight, at all events to Claude Duval, who chanced to be in such a position that he could see some distance further down the road than the others could.

By some fatality the horseman slackened his pace, and came on at a trot.

He glanced, too, uneasily from side to side, as though he had a presentiment of coming evil.

His horse was reeking with perspiration, and his mouth and chest were covered with thick white foam.

The rider was a man dressed in a semi-military costume.

All this Claude took in at a glance.

Suddenly, and just as the horseman was in front of the spot where the six men had concealed themselves, a loud voice cried out, in startling tones—

"Halt!"

Ninety-nine people in a hundred would have done as the rider did.

He stopped his steed in a moment.

But this action was all the more natural on his part, since from his occupation he was in the habit of receiving abrupt commands, and instantly obeying them.

Scarcely, however, had the echoes of the voice which had pronounced the word "Halt!" died away, and before the soldier had fairly stayed the progress of his horse, than there arose a loud and sharp explosion.

Mingled with this was a cry.

It came from the lips of the rider.

The men behind the hedge had taken up that position, then, to assassinate him, for the explosion was such as would be caused by a volley of small firearms.

A cloud of smoke hid all things from view for a moment, but, when it cleared away, the pale moonbeams discovered the rider and his steed lying in a strange confused and bleeding mass upon the road.

Our friends were horrified.

That such a cold-blooded and atrocious assassination could be planned and put into execution by Englishmen was almost more than they could believe.

But that such was so, there could now be no dispute.

Simultaneously and unanimously they sprang to their feet, and, drawing their swords, they rushed to the gate that led out into the lane.

The hedge was too thickly planted for them to force a way through it.

What might be deemed an infinitesimal portion of time sufficed for them to reach the gate.

When they entered the meadow, they had not fastened it, but merely let it swing to, which, from the way the hinges were hung, it had a tendency to do.

Dashing it open, they all four, in a compact body, rushed into the lane, and sped along it to where the unfortunate rider lay.

But they saw, ere they reached the spot, that the six assassins had crawled through the gap in the hedge, and were making for the same point.

CHAPTER CLXXX.

IN WHICH IS GIVEN SOME EXPLANATION OF THE ASSASSINATION IN THE LANE.

"FORWARD—forward, my friends!" shouted Turpin, as he perceived this circumstance. "Do not let them reach the poor fellow before we do, and thus allow them an opportunity of finishing their barbarous work."

With a rush, then, and a shout, they reached the place where the slaughtered soldier lay.

But the assassins, seeing persons approaching, did not fly, but came on as though it was fully their intention to contest what they had done.

Both parties arrived at the same moment.

Both had their swords drawn.

The assassins had the advantage in point of numbers, since there were six of them, while our friends were four.

But they had come off victorious at greater odds than those, and they felt no misgiving in attacking them, though, when they were close to them, they noticed in their foes a certain military appearance which they had not at first observed.

"Villains!" said Dick, "what is the meaning of this deed? Are we in England, that such things are suffered? Concealed behind the hedge, we have been spectators of all. Explain yourselves."

"We do not recognise your right to desire such a thing," said the man who had given the others instructions to get into ambush, and who, though there was no difference in them, might be supposed the one having the command. "We do not recognise your right. Begone, or you may get yourself into trouble."

"I say, explain yourself," said Dick, again, "or we will compel you to do so at the sword's point."

"That man is a traitor."

The one in command pointed to the ghastly, bleeding mass at his feet.

"Then, if so, why did he not receive a traitor's death?"

"He has."

"Not so. For the traitor there is the headsman's axe, and a public execution. Why was he shot down like a dog?"

"For State reasons."

"State reasons?"

"Yes; and now, knowing so much, and which I have exceeded my duty in telling you, depart."

"Never! The reasons you have given are not sufficient for us; and, look you, I stand now before his corpse, and none of you shall approach to extinguish the last spark of life that may cling to the wounded wretch, except over the dead bodies of myself and my companions."

"Treason—treason!" cried the man, "treason! These are doubtless traitors and rebels, too. Upon them! Take them prisoners! Slay them if they resist!"

With this, the six men precipitated themselves upon our friends, who met the onslaught bravely.

It would seem that these men were armed only with a sword and a short carbine. The latter had been discharged, so it would be a hand to hand contest.

A spectator would soon have seen how superior the highwaymen were in the use of the sword. They flashed their weapons round them with a rapidity which completely confused their adversaries.

Soon they had around them a circle of the dead and dying, while they, by the dexterity they parried all blows aimed at them, were unhurt.

Seeing the advantage they had gained, they pressed with still greater determination upon the assassins, over whom they felt they would obtain a speedy victory.

At length, all but two were beaten to the ground, and they, seeing the futility of longer opposing themselves to the highwaymen, threw down their swords, sank upon their knees, and sued for quarter.

This, of course, was granted to them upon the condition that they did not move in the least from where they then were.

The highwaymen were glad enough to breathe their swords, and rest a moment to regain their breath—for the conflict, though short, had been a desperate one.

While doing so, however, they looked around them at what might, with great propriety, be called the field of battle.

Four of the assassins were stretched upon the ground, weltering in blood.

One was dead: his head had been literally split open.

Three others were so badly wounded that it was very problematic whether they would recover.

One of these was the commander.

Then turning round, they saw a still more terrible spectacle.

Mingled in one inextricable mass; bleeding—palpitating—from those places where the six bullets had entered. The faint groans that arose, however, showed that the unhappy man who had been so treacherously slaughtered, was not dead.

The scene was a singular one.

"I say, Dick," exclaimed Claude, "this is a very singular affair, don't you think?"

"I do."

"What do you make of it?"

"Nothing."

"That is conclusive, at any rate! Can none of you make anything of it?"

The other two shook their heads.

"Can you make anything of it, Claude?" asked Dick. "I confess I cannot. Altogether it seems quite inexplicable. Had it occurred in Italy—Rome, for instance, I could have understood it."

"Ay, so could I; but here, in England, it is a mystery."

"Let us go to the two who have asked for quarter. Surely from them we shall be able to get some information."

"You question them, Dick; and don't let us be long about it, for if any one was to come along the road, we should be in a very awkward predicament indeed."

"We should. I will question them quickly."

Followed by his three comrades, Dick Turpin drew closer to the two men, who still remained upon their knees as they had been bidden.

"Now," said Dick, sternly, "we have spared your lives when we might have taken them. For this you are compelled to do something to show your gratitude. Now tell us the meaning of all this."

"Ask us, and we will reply," said one.

"Yes, we will," said the other.

"Good, then. Tell me why you so treacherously shot down that poor soldier yonder."

"He was no soldier."

"That does not matter."

"He was a rebel!"

"A rebel?"

"Yes."

"How so? In what way was he a rebel? Against whom and what did he rebel? Where is the rebellion?"

"In Scotland, sir!"

"In Scotland?"

"Yes; the Pretender's son, assisted by the French, has landed on the northern shores of Caledonia, where it is his intention, so we hear, to raise an army, and invade England."

This was startling news to our friends.

"How long have you learned this?"

"Only to-day, when a spy brought word that a messenger from the rebel camp to some Jacobites in London, was on the road, and would pass this way."

"And so you were ordered to shoot him down in the way you did!"

"We were, and did no more than obey the orders we received."

"This is monstrous!" cried Dick; "were he ten times a rebel, he deserved better treatment than that. What end did you hope to gain by his assassination?"

"There you ask more than I can tell for certain, but I fancy they expected to find upon his person papers which would enable them to arrest the chief Jacobites in London!"

"It is a poor cause for such means to be taken, and they will never better it."

"We have nothing to do with that. A soldier's duty is merely to obey."

"Are you soldiers, then?"

"We are."

"But you wear no uniform."

"I am aware of it. We were ordered to attire ourselves as you now see us. I imagine because we should be less likely to attract attention."

"It is as foul a deed as well could be. But you have told us enough! Rise! begone! and consider yourselves well off that you have escaped with your lives!"

The two disguised soldiers did not need to be told twice that they might go. They scrambled in a moment to their feet, and set off at full speed.

"This is a most extraordinary affair altogether, but we will say no more about it until we have looked to the messenger, and as soon as we have done that we will be off!"

So saying, Dick strode to where the person in question lay.

His three friends followed him.

A little examination showed them there was no hope that they would be able to restore him to life. He still lived, it is true, but it was but the last flickering of the lamp.

Dick bent down over him.

The horse was quite dead.

He had fallen in such a manner upon his rider, that to suppose them would be an impossibility without causing the poor wretch much unnecessary suffering.

"Speak!" said Dick. "If there is yet life enough in you to do so, speak! We are friends. Rest assured of that. Friends to you and to your cause!"

"Prince Charlie!" cried the dying man, in a feeble tone of voice. "Prince Charlie for ever! The papers! the papers!"

"Where are they?"

"They contain full details of the course our army is going to take, and there is a list of all persons in London who are favourable to our cause."

"But where—where are these papers?" said Dick. "Tell me where they are, and I will answer with my life that they do not fall into the hands of the Hanoverians!"

"Hurrah! for Prince Charlie!" cried the dying man, again. "He will yet be the king, and the Stuarts will be restored to their rights! That will be a bonnie time, but I shall never see it! The air grows dark—dark! Hurrah! for Prince Charlie! *Tandem triumphans*.* At length triumphant! I am cold! My lungs fill—fill—with blood! I—I!"

There was a gasping groan, and the spirit of the rebel fled for ever.

CHAPTER CLXXXI.

TOM KING RECALLS AN ADVENTURE TO DICK TURPIN'S MIND WHICH HE HAD FORGOTTEN.

"DEAD!" said Turpin.

"Yes, poor fellow!" replied Tom King. "He's dead enough now, and of all the shameful and disgraceful things I have ever heard of, this is the worst."

"The very worst!" said Claude Duval. "But let us be moving. I look upon it as something like a miracle that we should have had the road to ourselves so long as we have without an interruption, but we shan't much longer, for hark! I can hear a vehicle of some sort or other coming now."

The others paused at this, and after listening a moment a slight sound reached their ears, which verified what Claude had said.

"But do not let us go," said Tom King. "Whatever it may be that is coming, it is a long way off at present."

"But why should we stay?"

"Do you remember what the poor fellow said about the papers? It will not take us a moment, let us possess ourselves of them."

"Agreed!" said Turpin.

No cloud dulled the brightness of the moon, and so they were well able to see what they were about.

But the task they had set themselves was by no means an agreeable one.

When they moved the mangled remains, they perceived a kind of wallet that the messenger had carried suspended from his neck by a strap.

In this, doubtless, would be found the papers of which he had spoken.

By cutting the strap in two places they were able to get possession of this wallet.

It was of leather, and secured by a lock, which they did not attempt to try to unfasten, but Dick with his sword cut away the leather around it.

The wallet opened at once.

Their suspicions as to its contents were quite correct. It was filled with papers.

They were tied up neatly in packets.

Tom King transferred them to his coat-pocket.

"There," he said, "we can do no more good here, that is certain, so we will be off at once."

"Quick!" said Turpin, "or you will be too late."

They all four now ran down the lane to the gate.

Opening it, they all passed through, caught their horses, and mounted in an incredibly short space of time.

They did not reach the high-road, however, one moment too soon, for the vehicle they had heard approaching was now close at hand.

Short as the rest had been, it was enough to reinvigorate the horses, and they dashed along the road at a rate that soon left all sights and sounds behind.

About five miles further on they came to a rather steep hill, so they checked their cattle while they ascended it.

* The motto upon the Pretender's Standard.

Tom King took this opportunity to speak to Turpin; he had been anxious to do so for some time.

"Dick!"

"Yes, my friend."

"What we have just heard and witnessed has very forcibly brought back to my mind an incident which had entirely slipped my memory."

"What is it?"

"Is it possible it has not reminded you of it?"

"No, I remember nothing."

"I will tell you. Do you remember our first meeting?"

"Of course I do."

"Very well. It was not far from the 'Hand and Keys,' at Hornsey, was it?"

"Tom Davis's?"

"Yes."

"No, it was not very far from there. What of it?"

"Do you recollect how your mare was in London, and how Davis went to fetch it?"

"Perfectly."

"And how we went afterwards together?"

"Yes. What then?"

"As we were going on to London, we heard a horseman approaching; we stopped him, and he drew his sword and attacked me."

"By Jove! yes. The Young Pretender."

"The what?" asked Claude and Jack, who had listened with some curiosity to the little dialogue that had taken place between Turpin and King.

They, of course, were quite in ignorance of the incident, though the reader will doubtless remember it.

Should he not, it will be necessary for him to refer to the twenty-ninth and thirtieth chapters of this history, where it is given in detail.

The adventure was related to Claude and Jack.

"So," said the latter, "you really mean to say that you chanced to meet with young Charles Edward Stuart?"

"We did."

"And you did not find him a coward?"

"Quite the reverse, as the adventure proves."

"I asked, because he has always been represented to me as a coward."

"That is his enemies. He is no more a coward than I am."

"You must know," said Dick, "that Tom is quite on the side of the Stuarts."

"I am, and though they may have had their faults and failings, yet they are, nevertheless, the rightful heirs to the throne of England."

"Ah!" said Sixteen-String Jack, "that's a matter that interests me very little. What say you, Claude?"

"The same."

"Though, of course, just looking at it, I should be more on the Young Pretender's side than I should be on a foreigner's."

"Hear! hear!" said Tom. "Spoken like an Englishman. If they had been content to elect an Englishman to the throne, all would have been well, and there would have been but little disaffection; but, for my own part, I feel it an insult to the nation to set a lot of beer-swilling, muddle-headed Germans on the throne."

"You are getting excited, Tom."

"Never mind. It is a subject upon which one may be excused for exhibiting a little feeling."

"So it is."

"I spent my youth in the north of England, almost on the border, and so it is only natural that I should have imbibed some Scotch notions."

"That immediately accounts for your predilection in favour of the Stuarts."

"In a measure it does; but now, Dick, do you remember a little circumstance in connexion with our meeting with Charles Stuart, and which we have not yet mentioned?"

"I think I do."

"You must do."

"What is it?" asked Claude Duval.

"Why, this! Dick and myself both swore that as soon as he raised his standard, or rather as soon as the news of his having done so reached us, we would hasten to place ourselves under his banner!"

"You did?"

"Certainly. Didn't we, Dick?"

"Oh! we did, there's no denying that."

"And now we have the news that he has just raised his standard."

"But," said Claude and Jack, "do you think of going?"

"Why not? You would not have us break our words."

"Well, not exactly; but a soldier's life is none so pleasant."

"Pho, pho!"

"You will find it out."

"We shall be favoured."

"Put not your trust in princes."

"Ha! ha!"

"You may laugh."

"But, seriously speaking; and I will propose it more particularly to the captain here. Under all circumstances, don't you think the best thing we can do would be to push forward to the north, and take refuge in the ranks. We shall be quite safe there."

"I, for one, should approve of such a course, not only because I have sworn to do so, but because of the safety we should obtain."

"Then, captain," said Jack and Claude, "if that is your opinion, of course we subscribe to it!"

"Not if it is at all against your inclinations, my friends. You yourselves elected me to be your captain, but it is far from my desire to control all your actions. If you would rather not accompany us upon this expedition, you have only to say so, and we will either separate or abandon the idea altogether."

"It appears to me, now I come to think of it," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "about as good a thing as we could do."

"Then I give in to the majority," said Claude Duval.

"I should be very sorry for us to separate."

"So should we all!"

"Am I to understand, then," asked Turpin, "that in this matter we are quite of one mind?"

"Yes."

"And our plan of operations will be to make what speed we can to Scotland."

"Just so."

As these words were uttered they reached the top of the hill, and as the ascent had been a long and steep one, they paused for a little while to breathe their horses.

Before and behind them all was perfectly still.

"That must be a strange sight for any one coming upon it unawares!" said Tom.

"What?"

"The scene where the battle took place!"

"It must, indeed."

"For one thing, there is nothing to identify us with it, or such an outcry would be raised that we should never be able to evade capture, because all the fault would be sure to be laid to us."

"Undoubtedly."

"Whatever person in authority can have sanctioned the perpetration of such an act, I am at a loss to think."

"It seems incredible. Why were they not content with taking the poor man prisoner, and not shooting him down like some wild, noxious animal?"

"We shall learn nothing by thinking of it," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and when we say it is a foul and dastard deed, we say all we can."

"I am pleased," said Tom King, "that I have been able to prevent these papers, containing his future plans, from falling into the hands of his foes. Had they become possessed of them, his cause would have been overwhelmed in ruin."

CHAPTER CLXXXII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN RESOLVE TO JOIN THE ARMY OF THE YOUNG PRETENDER.

"Do you really think, Tom," asked Claude Duval, "that the young prince stands any chance of regaining the crown of his ancestors?"

"I do! The best of all chances! Unless I very much mistake, as soon as the intelligence is spread that he has been proclaimed, and at the head of an army, hundreds of thousands will flock to his standard; and every day will serve to bring him fresh adherents."

"You are enthusiastic."

"Perhaps I am; but, rely upon it, I shall do all I indubitably can to aid him."

"We do not doubt it," said the others, laughing.

"It was the way he behaved upon the occasion of the fight I had with him that won my heart."

"He acted most gallantly, by your accounts."

"We have not exaggerated, have we, Dick?"

"Certainly not."

"Then he is one of the right sort, and I should think it would be a happy day for England when he is proclaimed herking!"

"There is this to be said," remarked Claude Duval, "we cannot well make our position worse, even if we do join the rebel ranks, as they will be called, for we have forfeited our lives already."

"Oh! drop that part of the subject."

"I was going to observe, if the young prince is defeated, we shall not lose anything; but if he gains" —

"Ay, there it is," cried Tom King, exultingly. "If he gains, we shall stand high in his esteem. He will grant us free pardons for what we have done, and place us in a position that will enable us to be gentlemen for the remainder of our lives."

"You must not forget that he will have a great many claimants upon his bounty."

"I do not; but we stand upon rather peculiar ground. He promised."

"People in his position are always prolific in promises, and his race more particularly; but they have never been good at per-*forming*."

"Well—well, we shall see. The road is clear again, forward."

As he spoke, Tom King urged his horse to make better speed, and the others following his example, they swept along the road at a gallop of about fifteen miles an hour.

This rate of travelling got over the ground quickly.

At last, morning broke.

The first early leaden-coloured beams of light showed them to be at the outskirts of a small town, though what it was they, of course, had no idea, for neither of them had been in that part of the country before.

Lest they should, at that early hour, attract unusual notice, they slackened speed as they passed through the High-street.

None of the places were open.

The town, which was of tolerable size, was quickly left behind, and the open country again reached.

It was now a great many hours since either of our friends had tasted food, and they began to feel the cravings of hunger.

But nowhere could they see a place where they could be satisfied.

The keen morning air served in no small degree to whet their appetites.

Therefore, they kept a sharp look-out for a roadside public-house where they could get the refreshment they needed.

The sun, however, rose, and attained a considerable elevation before they found one.

This they perceived at a great distance, for in accordance with a by no means unusual fashion, a stout post was planted in the footpath near the road, and a swinging sign suspended from it.

When they came near enough, they saw the letters on this sign were, "The Bald-Faced Stag, by James Marsh."

"This will be the place for us," cried Dick Turpin, exultingly, as he walked Black Bess to the large horse-trough attached to the sign-post.

As soon as he reached it, a man came rather leisurely from the inn-door.

"Going to bait here, gentlemen?"

"We shall stay for a little while. Have you good accommodation for man and horse?"

"Look there. Don't you see that truss of straw hanging up?"

"Yes."

"What does that mean, then?"

"Oh! I suppose it is all right. Where are the stables?"

"I'll take care of the horses, gentlemen."

"Yes, I know, but we would rather see them housed, fed, and groomed ourselves. Do you understand?"

Dick slipped a five-shilling piece in the ostler's hand, as he asked the question.

"Oh! yes, gentlemen, I quite understand. Be good enough to come this way. Just under that arch, sir,

takes you to the stable yard. Mind you stoop your heads, gentlemen; you see the arch is rather low."

So saying, the ostler, who now was all obsequious, led the way to the stables.

According to their usual custom, then, our friends paid particular attention to the disposal of their steeds. They had too often experienced the benefit of doing so ever to neglect this precaution, although on the present occasion they might fairly have been excused if they had omitted it. They were absolutely famishing.

And they felt pretty well certain that they were near none of their foes.

The delay, however, was but trifling, and they eat their meal in all the greater ease in consequence.

Had they been suddenly surprised, and they in ignorance of the situation of the stables, they would have been in a very awkward fix indeed.

There is nothing connected with their stoppage at this inn at all worthy of record.

Having quite satisfied their hunger, they paid their reckoning, mounted their steeds, and departed.

That they were nearly, if not quite, unknown in that part of the country was pretty clear; but for all that, they took care not to do anything calculated to draw suspicion upon them.

It is questionable whether, in the whole length and breadth of England, four blither hearts could be found than those of the highwaymen.

As they cantered along the road, no one would have thought from their manner that they were in such great peril, or that so heavy a reward was hanging over their heads.

But then a danger that would have appalled most men, would have been looked upon by them with a careless smile.

And now, while they are travelling so quietly along the road, we feel that we cannot do better than give a few words of explanation before we enter upon what is certainly the most interesting and exciting episode in the lives of these celebrated highwaymen.

Many of the readers will not require to be told who and what the Young Pretender was, but yet there may be an equal number who do not, or, at all events, have at best but a confused idea upon the subject.

To these we shall more particularly address ourselves. The others may skip the few following lines.

King James II., then, as all who are in any way conversant with English history are aware, was dethroned, or, perhaps, more correctly, was compelled to abdicate the throne, upon which Prince William of Orange, afterwards King William III., was placed in his stead.

Now, the adherents to the family of Stuart, which, perhaps, included the whole of the Scottish population, would not admit that this forcible abdication barred the right of their family to the crown, and, on the accession of King George I., this question was agitated with much warmth.

Now James Stuart, or King James II., had a son, and it was contended by the Stuart faction that this son was the true heir to the crown, while the opposite party espoused the cause of King George I.

This son of the dethroned monarch, like him, bore the Christian name of James.

By the upholders of the Stuarts he was styled King James III.

By the upholders of the Hanoverian dynasty he was styled the Pretender, and this is the name by which he is most generally known—particularly at the present day.

Now, when George I. ascended the throne, an invitation was sent to the Pretender—who had taken refuge in France—to come to Scotland, where the friends to his cause were enlisting men for his service.

This invitation he accepted. He landed in Scotland, and very soon found himself at the head of a large army, whose numbers were continually augmenting.

The consequence was the outbreak, or civil war, between the two opposing parties, known to the rest of English history as the Rebellion of 1715.

The result of this is known. After a protracted struggle the Pretender was overthrown. Many noblemen who had taken part with him were executed, and their possessions confiscated, while the unfortunate James Stuart, accompanied by the Earl of Mar, managed, under the cover of the darkness, to get on board a vessel lying off Montrose, and afterwards land in France.

But, though his defeat was so complete, all hope of seeing him upon the throne was not abandoned by the Jacobites, as those persons were styled who adhered to the side of the Stuarts.

But no very active steps were taken for nearly thirty years after this event, when the son of this James Stuart, the Pretender, by name Charles Edward Stuart, was invited over to Scotland, as his father had been before him.

At this time George II. swayed the English sceptre.

And now the whole affair divided itself into two portions, or pretty nearly so. One the Catholics, the other the Protestants.

Charles Edward Stuart, like his ancestors, was of the Catholic faith.

King George II., of the Protestant persuasion.

This brief, and necessarily imperfect summary, will, we think, be sufficient to enable the reader to have a clear idea of who the Young Pretender was, and also what his pretensions were.

It will be seen they rested chiefly upon hereditary transmission.

Charles Edward Stuart, then, came over to Scotland upon the representations of those noblemen who were affected with him, and what was the ultimate result of this step, we shall, from the circumstance of the highwaymen attaching themselves to his fortunes, quickly know.

CHAPTER CLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN PERFORMS AN ACT OF CHARITY, AND THEN ONE OF RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

RETURNING from this digression, which succeeding events will show to be highly necessary to the proper understanding of the narrative, we will follow the fortunes of the four daring highwaymen upon the road.

They were a long way from Scotland and the Pretender's army, and they were destined to meet with some remarkable adventures before they reached either.

Mid-day saw them still upon their route, and a considerable distance from the inn where they had stopped to breakfast.

Despite the rapid approach of winter, the sun's rays, while he was passing the meridian, were very powerful, and, for the sake of their steeds, our friends were fain to go at a slower pace.

The district through which they passed was very sparsely populated, and conveyances were only now and then met with.

None of these did our friends venture to molest. They were under no pressing necessity, for the money they had in hand would serve to last them for a long time yet, and they by no means desired to be hunted through the country until they were forced into the Pretender's ranks.

For their own sakes it would look better if they came voluntarily.

It was somewhere about an hour past noon when Turpin, who was riding first, descried some object in the roadway.

In the distance he could not discern what it was. Its appearance was something unusual, and, therefore, he slackened his pace a little, in order to enable his comrades to come up with him.

"What is it, Dick?"

"That is just what I want to know. Look yonder."

"Where?"

"On the right hand side, at some distance further on. Can you see it?"

"A mass of something?"

"Yes, that is it."

"I see it very plainly."

"And I—and I!"

"What do you make it out to be?"

"I should say a human form, only it looks too large."

"That was my first thought," said Turpin. "We cannot be too careful."

"Certainly not!" said Claude Duval.

"It may not bode any danger to us, but I have made up my mind during my journey to be on the safe side, and distrust everything which I cannot exactly make out!"

"That is the plan!" chimed in Claude Duval. "Keep to that, and we shall be right, never fear!"

"I knew such a course would meet with your full



[DICK TURPIN IS SHOT BY LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.]

approbation, if it did no one else's. But come! Go quietly! We shall soon see what it is."

At a brisk walk, our friends now went along the road, their eyes all the time fixed upon the confused mass before them.

By degrees, as they grew nearer and nearer, its outlines began to grow distinguishable.

Half-sitting, half-lying upon the roadway, his back supported by the green embankment, upon the top of which the hedge was planted, was a man in the garb of a soldier.

But his uniform was torn in many places; in fact, it was nothing but mere rags and tatters.

Bending over him, and supporting his neck with her arm, was a woman.

So intent was she upon what she was about, that she did not hear the sound of the horses' hoofs, or if she did, she paid no sort of attention to it.

Upon perceiving what it was, the others would have ridden on, but Turpin, touched with the deep distress No. 34.—BLACK BESS.

apparent in both, and curious to learn some particulars of them, came to a halt.

Being then very close, he saw that the soldier was little more than a mere youth.

His cheeks were thin and haggard.

His countenance pale, even to ghastliness.

He was in a state of utter prostration, from what cause, of course, Dick knew not.

The woman, who seemed bowed down with suffering and privation, was long past the prime of life.

Deep furrows crossed and recrossed themselves over her face, and her hair was streaked with silver.

Her apparel, too, was ragged and travel-strained; the boots, too, which, in some mysterious manner, clung to her feet, indicated that they had done much service.

A groan came occasionally from the young man's lips.

It was echoed by a sigh and a gush of tears from her who, by her age and similarity of features, was doubtless his mother.

Her whole attention was centred upon the exhausted youth.

It did not take long for Dick, with his keen eyes, to note all this.

That their suffering was genuine he had no doubts. Open-hearted and generous, and always ready to assist the necessitous whenever he had the power, it is not to be wondered at that he addressed the poor grief-stricken woman.

He drew yet nearer to her, and then resting his hand upon his mare's croup, he turned half round in the saddle, and spoke—

"Look up, my good woman," he said. "Look up. You are in trouble! I am a friend! Can I do anything to help you, or lighten your load of misery?"

The poor woman turned round with a sob of anguish, as these words of sympathy and kindness fell upon her ears.

They were the first she had heard for a long, long weary time.

Dashing the tear-drops from her eyes, she strove to look upon the face of he who had addressed her, and, at the same time, she endeavoured to control her voice.

But a faint "God bless you, sir," was all that she could utter.

"Calm yourself," said Dick. "My time is precious. Tell me, if I can do anything to help you; tell me whether I can relieve any part of your unhappiness. Calm yourself, and speak."

Dick Turpin spoke these words in a kind, gentle, reassuring manner.

They had their due effect, for the poor woman removed her arm from around the youth's neck, and rose to her feet. It required a great effort for her to do so.

"God bless you, sir," she said, "and thank you for I cannot. You see that poor young man there—he is my son."

This was an announcement for which Dick was fully prepared; but, nevertheless, observing that she paused, he endeavoured to put her still more at her ease.

"He is a soldier; is he not?"

"Yes, sir, he is—or rather was."

"Is he not a soldier now?"

"No, sir."

"How is that?"

"Ah, sir, you may well ask that question. It is a black tale, but my poor boy will surely be set right at last—though I fear he will never be alive to see it. I can tell you his history in a few words, and then you will be able to tell whether you can assist me."

"I will listen with pleasure," replied Turpin, "that is, providing that you do not keep me here too long, and I trust that it will be in my power to do you a permanent benefit."

"You are very kind, sir—very kind. There are few I find who can feel for the distresses of another as you do. Would there were more like you."

"Pho, pho! don't mention that; let me hear your story."

"You shall, sir; are those friends of yours?"

She indicated the other three, who were a few yards off.

"Yes," replied Dick, "they are intimate and dear friends of mine."

"That is enough. And now, sir, I will begin, though I fear I have tired your patience already."

"No—no."

"Twelve months ago then, my poor son there took the King's shilling and enlisted. It has proved a sad thing for him."

"It seems so."

"Perhaps I ought to mention, sir, that at one time we occupied a decent position in life. But the same thing dragged me down into the depths of poverty that has dragged down others. My husband took to drinking and to gambling."

"Alas! I see the end."

"I will tell you, sir. My husband gambled till he was ruined, till there was not a fraction we could call our own, and then—then—he drank—drank himself to death!"

It was in a choking and broken voice that the wife confessed the husband's degradation.

"I struggled on as well as I was able, and managed to earn a scanty living. My son, who had never been brought up to any trade, took what he considered the

only honourable course open to him—he entered the army. That, as I told you, was twelve months ago."

The poor woman paused, and wiped her eyes with her apron.

Dick found he was listening eagerly and impatiently for the continuation of her melancholy history.

"I ought to mention that from the time he was a mere child, an affection has subsisted between him and one who was the daughter of a neighbour in the time of our prosperity."

"This feeling endured through all the vicissitudes of fortune which we have known—unchanged, unabated."

"But her parents—and, as I may say, only reasonably and justly—forbade her to hold any communication with my son; but she loved him too well to obey this mandate."

"In brief, after his enlistment, and things were going on a little smoothly, she forsook her father's roof, and they were secretly married; a step, which, however well-advised it may sometimes seem, is invariably a forerunner of unhappiness and misfortune."

"My son, of course, enlisted as a private."

"One of the lieutenants in the regiment to which my son belonged, whose name is Beckwith, and who has risen in the world, as we have sunk down in it, for some cause or other, I know not what, took a dislike to my son."

"I could never hear the cause of this dislike, but I can more than suspect it."

"I will tell you!" said a hollow voice, and the exhausted youth endeavoured to assume an erect posture.

CHAPTER CLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN MEETS WITH A SERIOUS MISHAP THROUGH THE TREACHERY OF LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.

"I HAVE heard all that you have said," continued the exhausted youth. "Many thanks, sirs, for your kindness. I would have said as much before had I been strong enough. But now I can tell you how—how—"

Vainly did he try to rally his energies; he sank back again into his old position against the bank.

His mother was in a moment down again upon her knees, her arms encircling his neck.

He had swooned, and her agony for a minute or two was really dreadful to witness, for she thought him dead.

Slowly, however, he unclosed his eyes.

"Do not try to speak," said Dick, perceiving he was about to address him. "The effort is too much for you. I am much interested in your story. Your mother shall tell me the rest."

"Do, mother."

"I think I told you, sir, that Lieutenant Beckwith conceived an animosity against my son?"

"You did."

"Ah! sir, I don't suppose there is much need for me to tell you that when a superior officer has a grudge against one of the men under him, that that man is marked out for disgrace and punishment. It was so with my poor son."

"Curse him!" said the son, feebly, who had sufficient possession of his senses to understand the import of what was said.

"Hush, my boy! hush! Curse him not. Curse no one. Look you, sirs, in a little while, for some trifling offence, my son was sentenced to receive fifty lashes. It was not the pain he cared for, it was the degradation. Again, in a few weeks after he was well, the same thing occurred. The last time he deserted, and here you see him. It is the lacerated state of his back which makes him so powerless and unable to bear fatigue. You would not have patience to listen to all the privations we have suffered. When he came to me, and told me what he had done, I broke up my little home at once and fled with him, carrying away all that was valuable."

"What we have gone through since then no tongue can tell. The little supply of money that we had was very soon exhausted, and since then we have wandered about, subsisting upon the charity of others. Hitherto we have managed to elude those who have been sent out to apprehend him and drag him back to barracks, though how we have managed to do it is a mystery. Lieutenant Beckwith is upon his track, and I fancy will never rest until he has recaptured him."

"I am truly sorry for you," said Dick, "and I wish I was in a position to afford you permanent assistance, but that I cannot, for many reasons. However, here are a few

guineas. Take them and use them to the best advantage. They will enable you to buy him new apparel; and have his hurts properly seen to. Here; take them!"

As he spoke, Dick drew from his pocket a handful of guineas, and dropped them into the poor woman's apron. Then, not wishing to receive the united thanks of the mother and the son, he made a sign to his companions and rode away.

During the brief conference which had taken place, his three comrades had stood around him in a circle a little distance off; yet not far enough to be out of earshot.

"What do you think of that little episode of military life, my friends?" asked Dick; for they were not going fast enough to make conversation difficult.

"Unfortunately," said Claude Duval, "it is only too commonly the case. That poor fellow is the type of thousands. In the army, if a superior officer takes a dislike to one beneath him, and if a revengeful disposition, it is a case. The best thing the fellow can do will be to blow his brains out at once."

"You seem to know a little of military matters, Claude," said Turpin. "I have never heard your history, except in a fragmental fashion; but I should uncommonly like to do so."

"I am yours to command, captain, and when we have an opportunity of sitting down quietly together, I shall have great pleasure in relating it."

"Agreed; I shall call upon you to fulfil your promise; but you did not reply to my question."

"As to being in the army?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have, though it is a good many years ago now. When you hear my history you will know all about it. Ah! look! here! who's coming?"

Upon this the others looked along the road, and there they saw approaching them a man on horseback.

He was magnificently mounted.

As the sun shone upon his attire, it showed by glittering here and there, that he wore some kind of uniform.

He was coming at a gentle trot, and looking carefully around him, as though in quest of something.

On getting closer our friends perceived by his dress that he was a lieutenant in the army.

It is astonishing how ideas, or notions rather, will spring up into the mind, and remain there with the full force of conviction.

No sooner did Dick perceive this traveller than he immediately connected him with the story he had heard.

In fine, he made up his mind he was the evil genius who had haunted the poor soldier's life, and driven him to desertion—Lieutenant Beckwith.

"Hold back, my friends," he said, "and allow me to ride forward and meet this man, myself."

"But why?"

"Oh! never mind. I wish to see whether a suspicion I have formed will be confirmed."

As he spoke, Dick gave Bess the rein, and soon slot ahead of his companions.

The lieutenant, upon hearing the rapid beat of horses' hoofs approaching him, looked up and perceived Turpin.

Somewhat to the surprise of the latter, the lieutenant quickened the speed of his horse, and hastened towards him.

"Good day!" he said. "May I trouble you a moment?"

Dick, of course, came to a halt.

"Have you come far along this road?"

"Yes; a considerable distance."

"Indeed, then perhaps you will tell me whether you have met with an old woman and her son. The latter in the uniform of the regiment, from which he has deserted. I received intelligence, less than an hour ago, that they were somewhere upon the road. Have you seen them? If so, let me know when, for, I need scarcely tell you, I am empowered to arrest him. Have you seen any one answering this description?"

"Yes, I have," replied Turpin, quietly.

"Where? Let me know where, or the villain may gain escape."

"You are the villain."

"Sir?"

"I say, you are the villain."

"You shall retract that word."

"Never! That is, if you are the individual I take you to be."

"My name is Beckwith. Lieutenant Beckwith."

"I thought as much, and, being so, I say you are a villain. I have seen the poor fellow of whom you are in pursuit, and from his mother's lips have heard his history."

The lieutenant's face became livid with rage.

"I will let you know, sir, that a soldier is not to be insulted with impunity. But I know you not. Who are you?"

"That can matter little; I know you."

"But you may be a robber, and under such belief I act as I now do."

During the time he was speaking, the lieutenant had held his hand in the pocket of his coat.

Dick had his eye upon him.

As soon as he uttered these last words, he drew, with inconceivable rapidity, a pistol, and, aiming hastily, fired.

Prepared as he, to some extent, was for this treacherous assault, Dick was not able to draw back quick enough to wholly escape the shot.

He felt that he was hit, and no sooner did he have this consciousness than he staggered and fell off his mare.

Well it was for him that he rode so docile an animal, or his life would assuredly have been forfeit.

As it was, however, Black Bess stood perfectly still, and he sustained no further injury than in coming in contact with the ground.

But the report of the pistol rang out loudly and distinctly, and reached the ears of his three friends, who at once galloped forward to his assistance.

Lieutenant Beckwith, who, by this act, showed that he was dead to all feelings of honour and fair play, would have subjected Dick to still further ill-usage, had it not been for his three comrades.

When he saw them rushing towards him with swords drawn, and cries of menace on their lips, a new phase in the lieutenant's mental composition showed itself.

That was cowardice.

But the reader will hardly feel surprised to hear that such a man was a coward; it would have been strange had he not been.

He immediately turned and fled.

"After him, Claude! After him, Jack!" cried Tom King. "Do not lose sight of him. Capture and punish him. I will stay here and look to Dick, whose condition, I hope, is not so bad as it appears."

There was no time to hesitate, so Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack spurred their horses forward, and gave chase, while Tom King, throwing himself off his horse, rather than alighting from it, hastened to ascertain the extent of his friend's injuries.

And, in sooth, they seemed to be great indeed, for Dick lay at full length, without the least signs of life or motion, while blood flowed in great quantities from a ghastly-looking wound in his head.

Black Bess was standing near him, her head bent down towards his face. She could tell something was amiss, and knew not what.

She trembled all over with intense terror.

CHAPTER CLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN RECOVERS SLIGHTLY FROM HIS WOUND, AND TREATS HIS ENEMY MUCH BETTER THAN HE DESERVES.

"Woe, Bess, lass," said Tom King, for he feared she might be startled and run away. "Woe, Bess, lass. Gently, gently! All's well, I daresay. There now, mare—quiet, quiet."

He patted her, at first gently, then firmly, upon the neck as he spoke.

This soothed her.

But, in order to prevent accidents, he kept a firm hold of her bridle while he bent down over his friend.

"Dick—Dick, old boy! Are you too bad to speak? Dick! Dick!"

But the highwayman paid no heed to his words. He might as well have addressed himself to a block of inanimate matter.

Tom now began to grow seriously alarmed. The wound,

he feared, was a more serious one than he had at first imagined.

He was in great perplexity what to do.

He wanted water, but there was none at hand, and he did not like the idea of leaving him in his defenceless condition upon the roadway while he sought for some.

Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he proceeded to wipe away the blood, in order to ascertain, if possible, the extent of the injury he had received.

The result was rather reassuring.

The bullet had struck his head a little behind his left temple, but it had not broken the bone.

It left a very ugly furrow, though, along the side of his skull, leaving, in a place or two, the bone completely bare.

From this the blood came at an alarming rate, so fast, indeed, that Tom began to grow apprehensive that he would bleed to death.

He listened in vain for the sounds that would indicate the return of his companions.

All around was still—still as the bleeding form by the side of which he knelt.

It was not, perhaps, until that moment that Tom King really felt how much attached he had grown to Turpin, but the prospect of for ever parting with him served to show how dear a place he occupied in his heart.

He would have given anything to restore him to life and health and strength, even as he had been only a few minutes before his meeting with the treacherous officer.

The time seemed very long to Tom. Each second was prolonged into a minute, each minute into an hour.

At last, however, the welcome tramp—tramp of horses' hoofs—reached his ears.

Now, he trusted, all would be well.

He rose to his feet, and, standing in the middle of the road, looked down at, anxious to catch the very first glimpse of them he could.

On they came at a rapid rate, for they were very uneasy about the condition of their captain.

Tom saw three horsemen coming, and he knew then that they had been successful in their chase.

They had Lieutenant Beckwith prisoner.

A few minutes brought them to where Tom stood.

The officers' hands were bound tightly behind him. Claude Duval had his rein; Sixteen-String Jack held him by the collar.

"How is Dick?" was the question that came simultaneously from their lips. "He is not much hurt, I hope!"

"I fear he is."

"Woe be to the villain, then, who injured him!"

"He is quite insensible! I cannot rally him! And he bleeds profusely!"

"You want some water. Ride back, Jack, and fetch a hatful from the brook that crosses the road a little lower down."

"All right, but mind you keep hold of our prisoner!"

"Trust me for that!"

Sixteen-String Jack released his grasp, and galloped back, until he came to a brook or mimic river that flowed completely across the road.

Here he filled his hat, and, as it was steeple-crowned in shape, it held a tolerable quantity of the pure fluid.

Hastening back as quickly as he could, he found Claude in the meantime had adopted rather ingenious means of securing their captive.

His arms having already been tied behind him, he had made him alight from the horse. Then unbuckling the stirrup leather, he passed it between his arms and his back, and then buckled it again, thus binding him to the saddle.

The reins Claude had tied to the stout projecting arm of a tree

This having been done, he was able to make a close personal inspection of Turpin's hurt.

He was thus engaged when Jack returned.

The first thing done with the water was to sprinkle a little of it on Dick's countenance, and endeavour to bring him back to life.

This it succeeded in doing. He gave a shuddering sort of sigh, and then opened his eyes.

He looked about him with a bewildered air, being at first quite unable to comprehend what had happened.

But seeing the familiar faces of his three friends bend-

ing over him what little amount of uneasiness he may have at first felt was dissipated.

"Lie still a minute or two, Dick," said Claude, seeing that Turpin was about to rise. "Lie still a moment; you have been hit, wounded. Let us dress your wound first, and wash away the blood that has clotted round it."

To this Dick offered no opposition, so with the handkerchief that he had previously used, steeped in the cold water, he proceeded to bathe it.

When the blood was completely washed away, the wound looked nothing like so serious as it had done before.

In those days it was the fashion to wear neck-clothes of white cambric, of a very voluminous description. They were folded several times, passed twice round the throat, and had ends hanging down almost to the waist.

Tom took off his own, and thoroughly soaked it in water.

Then he placed it round Dick's head, tying it as tightly as he was able behind.

"Better!" said Turpin, as soon as this was done.

"Much better! Until you tied that knot, I felt as though my head was falling to pieces; but it is all right now—quite right!"

"Do you think you could keep your feet, if we assisted you to rise?"

"Oh! yes; with all the ease in the world."

Upon this assurance, they lifted him up as carefully and tenderly as they could.

But when he was in an erect position, Dick felt the full extent of his weakness, and, had they not held him firmly up, he would have fallen to the ground.

By an effort, not to allow himself to be overcome, he recovered himself.

"Where is Bess?" he cried.

"Here!"

"Help me to mount her! Once in the saddle, and bestriding her back, I shall feel that I am safe. Where is the villain who fired so treacherously upon me?"

"Close at hand; but do not trouble yourself about him. Leave us to deal with him."

"No—no!" said Turpin. "Oh! for a draught of water—I parch."

"One moment," said Jack, "and I will fetch you some, though I have nothing better than my hat to bring it in."

"That will make an awkward drinking cup! I think the best way will be for Dick to mount, and ride to the place—it is not far off."

"Yes—yes! Believe me, I get stronger and better each moment, and some water will put me quite right."

"I will go with you, then," said Sixteen-String Jack, "as I know the place, and the others can keep guard over the prisoner."

This was assented to.

The brook was soon reached, and here Jack assisted Turpin to dismount.

Then the latter, lying at full length upon the road, put his lips to the surface of the water and drank heartily.

When he had quite assuaged his thirst, Jack persuaded him to remain where he was for a little time, while he poured water over him.

This he did by filling his hat, and then holding it above Dick's head emptied it.

The fresh, cool water was very refreshing and grateful to Dick's wound. It allayed the irritation.

Ten minutes of this treatment made a wonderful difference to Dick's feelings.

He rose to his feet a new man.

No longer did he require assistance to mount. He seated himself in the saddle without difficulty.

Then turning her head, he directed Black Bess towards where the others stood.

Well pleased, indeed, were they to see him looking so much better.

But there was an expression of stern ferocity upon his face which none of them had ever seen before, and which boded no good to Lieutenant Beckwith.

A clear recollection of all that had taken place came back to them.

And certainly, if anything more than another was calculated to raise a feeling of exasperation in the breast of any one, the treacherous attack which had been made was well qualified to produce that effect.

Dick Turpin was a good-tempered enough sort of fellow,

but he could not put up with such a thing as that, nor allow it to go unresented.

"Well, Dick?" they said.

"Yes, I am well," he replied. "But where is the traitorous wretch who attempted my life?"

"Calm yourself, he is here. Take my advice, do not get excited, or the consequences may be more serious than you imagine."

"I shall keep cool, never fear."

As he spoke, Dick guided Black Bess past Tom and Claude, who had purposely interposed themselves between him and the lieutenant.

But they saw how determined Dick was, and they judged it would be more harmful to thwart him than it would be to let him have his own way.

"Dastard! villain!" he said. "You fully deserve instant death at my hands; but I will be more magnanimous than you could ever think of being. You have had your shot at me; it is now my turn to have my shot against you. But I will not take your life, like an executioner. I will give you a chance, and put you on a better footing than I am sure you can deserve."

CHAPTER CLXXXVI.

THE END OF LIEUTENANT BECKWITH.—THE ARRIVAL AT THE "OLD WHITE LION INN."

"MERCY! have mercy!" cried Lieutenant Beckwith, as he heard Dick speak, and saw the stern look upon his features. "Spare me, and I will promise not to molest!"

"Silence!" said Dick; "do not make me think more contemptuously of you than I do already."

"What do you intend to do, Dick?" asked Tom, hastening to his side. "You are exciting yourself. Pray be calm, and tell us what you intend to do."

"I will; I intend to give him back shot for shot. Release him, but take care that he does not escape. Give him a loaded pistol, and I will take one too. You can serve as umpires to see fair play between us. Come, make haste, we have no time to lose."

"No," said the lieutenant, in a different tone of voice to that in which he had previously spoken, "no, we have no time to lose. I will consent to what he asks, although I know him not."

This sudden alteration in his manner may seem strange, but it can be easily accounted for.

Lieutenant Beckwith was an accomplished duellist.

He had conceived a sudden and rancorous animosity against Dick.

To have slain him or put him to great torture would have given him the utmost pleasure.

So when he found by the words he had spoken to his companions, that he was going to allow a duel to take place, he felt bold and elated, for so great was his skill in the use of a pistol, that he was confident of obtaining a victory over his opponent.

Dick's comrades saw, by the fixed and determined expression of his countenance, that it would be mere folly to attempt to dissuade him from fighting the duel, though they saw how perilous it was.

They could only hope for the best.

The officer was released from his bonds.

Jack was on the look out to see that he did not escape; but their late prisoner did not make the attempt.

He was going to face the matter out, and that with as much valour as he could muster.

But his face was deathly pale, and his eyes looked fixed and stony.

Turpin dismounted.

He took from the holster of his saddle a pistol.

That it was well and carefully loaded he knew, and he threw up the pan in order to see that the priming was all right.

It had caked slightly, so he handed it to Tom, who primed it afresh.

Then a pistol was placed in the hands of the lieutenant, and the two combatants were ready for fight.

They stood facing each other at about eighty feet distance.

The agreed upon signal was the pronunciation by Claude of the words one, two, and three.

He was to hold a handkerchief in his hand, and as he

said three, he was to let it fall, the adversaries keeping their eye upon it.

Claude began.

"One!"

"Two!"

But before the three fairly came from his lips there was the report of a pistol.

The officer had fired.

Fired before his time, hoping by so doing to slay his opponent.

But the word was on Claude's lips, and he uttered it, letting fall the handkerchief as arranged.

Apparently, with the utmost calmness, and yet with the utmost rapidity, Dick raised his arm, pulled the trigger, and fired.

The echoes of the sharp report mingled strangely with a horrible death-cry, and then all was still.

Lieutenant Beckwith fell to the ground.

Our three friends rushed forward to Turpin.

He was erect, and apparently unharmed.

"All is well, I fancy," he said; "the traitor did not succeed. It was a close touch, though, as you may guess. Look!"

Dick moved the collar of his coat, and showed that it was perforated by a bullet, which had left a track of its progress on the skin upon the side of his neck.

"Close enough!"

"Is the rascal dead?"

"I think so; but, Dick, you look very—very pale. I fear this matter, take it altogether, will be too much for you."

It was Tom King who spoke.

"No—not," he said; "let us ascertain what sort of a condition he is in, and then we will push forward upon our road."

Dick went towards his foe as he spoke, and the others noticed with alarm how unsteadily he walked.

The lieutenant lay quite still.

He had fallen forward upon his face.

It was Jack who, stooping down, turned him over on his back, and said—

"He is dead!"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite! Your bullet has passed completely through his brain!"

"And so may all treacherous villains, as he was, meet with their reward!" cried Dick. "Draw him to the side of the road, and then let us be off. The sooner we remove ourselves now from this part of the country the better."

It cost Dick a great effort to carry things off with a high hand in the way he did.

The wound in his head was one beneath which most persons would have succumbed.

The other three highwaymen could say nothing against leaving that spot with all speed. It was evidently the best thing they could do.

Accordingly they set off at a gentle gallop.

In after times, Dick often wondered how that gallop was performed, and by what mysterious means he retained his seat in the saddle.

But little was said.

Dick was silent, because he felt he had scarcely strength enough to speak.

His comrades were silent, because they did not want to tempt him to join in the conversation.

They saw what a bad state he was in.

Each of them, full of apprehension for his ultimate safety, and cursing in their hearts the unfortunate meeting with the deserter, looked carefully after him, and were in readiness to afford him assistance, the very moment that he needed it.

In this way they proceeded for a long, long time.

It was their intention to put up for the night at the first roadside public-house they came to, and chance the consequences.

The day now began to draw rapidly to a close; but as yet they had not been successful in meeting with what they desired.

Swaying about in the saddle, and keeping up with very great difficulty, Dick Turpin endeavoured to hide, as much as possible, the dreadful pain that he had endured.

The wound in his head was but a flesh one, though of a very disagreeable and dangerous character; but it had

bied freely, and to this circumstance he unquestionably, upon that occasion, owed his life.

Then the manner in which his head had been dressed, though simple in the extreme, yet was the one best calculated to drive away all inflammation and irritation.

But it was the after-part that the three friends dreaded: not only would Dick be in danger, but it would delay them upon their route, and allow their descriptions to get before them.

If this should happen, the remainder of their journey would be performed with great peril.

This risk, however, they would have to run, for that Dick could be expected to hold out much longer, was out of all question.

Deeper and deeper grew the shades of evening.

Nothing occurred to vary the dull monotony of their route.

At length, and when it had grown quite dark, they perceived in the distance a faint star-like, stationary light.

This seemed to indicate that at last they were close at hand to what they had for so long been on the look out for.

They were impatient to ascertain this, and one and all urged his horse to quicker motion in order to ascertain.

Yes! they had reached a house of entertainment at last. The light which they had seen was a candle, placed behind a small window in the gable end of the roof.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs as they stopped in front of the inn, reached the ears of those within, and two persons hastened to the door-step.

These beings were the landlord and the ostler, respectively.

Tom King took upon himself to be spokesman; so riding forward a pace or two in advance of the rest, he said—

"Can you give us or our horses accommodation here for the night, landlord? One of us has been slightly wounded in an attack made upon us by some robbers a few miles from here, and he stands very much in need of rest and refreshment."

"Of course—of course, gentlemen. Walk in—walk in! Simeon, take the gentlemen's horses, and assist them to alight. This way, if you please, this way."

The landlord, who was an active, dapper little man, led the way into the interior of the inn.

All followed him, with the exception of Claude, who went to see where the horses were placed.

The "Old White Lion"—for such was the name of the inn—was a quiet public-house in a very lonely, sparsely populated place, and doing but little business; so it is not to be wondered at that four guests coming all at one time, and wanting accommodation for the night for themselves and horses, should create some slight commotion, and induce the utmost willingness to attend to all their wants.

The ghastly pallor of Dick's face, which, by the ruddy firelight, was all the more perceptible, called forth a great deal of remark, for the landlord was rather inclined to be loquacious.

Not to linger too long over trivial details, when we have so much pressing upon us of the utmost and stirring importance to relate, let it suffice to say that, after a tolerable meal, of which, however, Dick partook sparingly, our friends were shown to a large room at the top of the house, where all four could sleep.

Here the bandage that enveloped Dick's head was resaked with water, which was about all that could be done.

By mutual consent they postponed all conversation as to what should be their next proceedings, until tomorrow, by which time they hoped Dick would be tolerably well.

He either would be in a fair state of recovery, or else in a high fever, so the morning was looked forward to with much anxiety.

CHAPTER CLXXXVII.

THE LANDLORD OF THE "OLD WHITE LION" MAKES A DESPERATE ATTACK UPON OUR FRIENDS.

MANY hours had not passed away when the slumber of our friends was broken by the shrill blast of a horn.

It was profoundly dark, and they rose at first without knowing what it was that had awoke them.

Before, however, they could ask themselves, they heard the sound again.

"What's that?"

Such was the question that rose simultaneously to the lips of the highwaymen.

And now, as their eyes got familiar with the darkness, they were able to see the windows in the room, of which there were two, and situated opposite to each other.

After asking the question, their next impulse was to crawl to the window, and look out.

They could not see very distinctly through the little panes of green bottle-glass, so they quietly opened one-half of the latticed casement.

The moment they did this, a rush of cold air filled the chamber, chilling them to the bone.

But they heard something which made them pass over this circumstance unheeded.

It was the low, rumbling sound of some vehicle upon the road.

"The coach," said Claude, with a disappointed air.

"What coach?" asked Turpin, whose brains were not in the clearest state.

"The Warwick coach, I fancy."

"Stand and deliver! Tom!"

"Hush, Dick! listen."

The rumbling, grating, and grinding of the wheels now grew much plainer, and again the horn sounded, with a shrillness sufficient to have awakened the soundest sleeper.

Some undefined feeling of curiosity made the four highwaymen linger near the window, and listen to what took place upon the arrival of the coach—for such they took it to be, and, considering the experience they had had in distinguishing the sounds of different vehicles, they were pretty certain to be right.

They were in this instance, for, in a few minutes, the coach stopped before the inn door.

Having the window open, they were able to see down into the front of the inn, where a scene of great animation took place.

The "Old White Lion," it seemed, was a place where the horses were changed.

There was a great deal of bustle and talking, and the busiest in making both was the landlord.

Our friends looked down with considerable interest.

The operation of changing was soon over, but just before it was, the guard drew the landlord aside.

"Here's a parcel of bills for you," he said. "I had a lot given me when I started from London, with instructions to leave a packet at every place I stopped."

"What bills are they?"

"You must read and see. They offer two thousand five hundred pounds reward for the apprehension and conviction of those four notorious highwaymen, Richard Turpin, Thomas King, Claude Duval, and John Rann, otherwise known as Sixteen-String Jack!"

"Lor!"

"They are known to be somewhere on this road. They have been traced to it, so I would advise you to keep your weather eye open. Such a sum as that isn't seen every day, and, when it is, isn't to be sneezed at."

"By no means! I'm much obliged to you."

"Read the bills attentively, old fellow, and pay particular attention to the descriptions. They are cunning foxes, and just beware whenever you see four chaps together on horseback."

"Four chaps?"

"On horseback. I say, look sharp, for, ten to one, they are the individuals."

"Oh! ah! I shouldn't wonder"—who, on the surprise of the moment was about to let out that he had four gentlemen in his house at that moment.

But the dread of having to share the reward, when, he considered, if he only managed properly, he could have it all to himself, and the credit of the capture besides, he became silent, and stopped himself in the middle of his speech.

The guard did not notice it, but, just at that moment, the coach began to move, so he was obliged to run and scramble up into his seat as well as he was able.

The coach, which was on the way from London to Warwick, disappeared in the darkness of the night.

They heard the landlord enter the inn and shut the door.

"What do you think of that, my friends," asked Dick, in his natural tones. The new peril with which they were menaced, seemed to have the effect of dispersing the mists of delirium that hung about his brain.

"I think it is high time we were off," said Tom King. "This is certainly no longer any place for us, but I am rejoiced to find that you have so far recovered from the effects of your wound."

"Thanks. Yes, I feel all right now. When I say all right, I mean excepting the disagreeable pain there is all along one side of my head."

"I am glad it is no worse. I was so very afraid," said Claude. "It was a close touch."

"Rather too close to be pleasant; but do not let us stop to speak about that now; we have other matters of greater moment to take into immediate consideration."

"We have, indeed; and the first one, I consider, will be to see in what way we can best leave this house, so that our departure may be neither seen nor heard."

"There is no doubt about that."

"It will not do to attempt to get out by descending the stairs. The inmates are astir. Perhaps, by this time, they have read the bills and recognise us."

"I think that's extremely likely."

"How are we to leave, then?"

"The window?"

"Too high. We have no rope, and there are no buildings to break the descent."

"But here is another window opposite, and consequently, as I take it, at the back of the house. We have not looked at that yet. Perhaps we may be able to get out through it."

"This was probable enough; and, feeling that the sooner they got out of the 'Old White Lion' the better it would be for them, they hastened to the back window."

Exclamations of gratification rose to their lips when they saw that immediately below it was a slanting roof, down which they could proceed without much difficulty, and thence drop to the ground.

"Capital," said Dick. "Let us be off at once. Claude, you know where to find the horses."

"Yes, but you must not think of going first. As I consider I know the way best, and as you are not so well as you might be, you ought to give way in a moment."

"And so I do," said Dick, as he drew back.

With a little trouble, Claude managed to squeeze his bulky frame through the window.

He reached the tiles in safety.

"Come on," he said.

"No," replied Turpin, in a whisper. "You go first, we will follow. Ten to one if the roof will bear our united weights, whereas it might do singly. Make your way to the stable and get the horses ready."

Claude was well-pleased to find Dick again assuming the command, and he would not have thwarted him upon any account.

So he slipped down the tiles and disappeared in a moment.

Tom King went next, then Turpin followed, and at last Sixteen-String Jack brought up the rear.

They all dropped to the ground in perfect safety, and so far as they could tell at present, without creating the least alarm.

The night was a very dark one, and they were fearful to move at first, lest they should stray to some place, and be discovered.

"Hist! Claude!" they cried, but to no effect. Claude appeared to be out of earshot.

Impatiently, then anxiously, they waited there, for him to make his appearance.

But as no signs of his doing so manifested themselves, Sixteen-String Jack ventured to go alone to seek him, bidding the other two on no account to move from where they then stood, or he might not be able to find them in a hurry, when every second would be of the utmost importance.

And now we will proceed to relate now it was that Claude was so long away.

On going to the stable with the ostler, he had given particular instructions where the saddles were to be placed, and saw it hung up in one part of the stable, where hooks were driven into the wall for the purpose.

As to his consternation, when he came now to find that the wall was bare, the hooks empty.

A cold perspiration broke out over him at the thought that it was suspected who they were, and that the saddles had been removed on purpose to prevent their departure.

To quite satisfy himself upon that point, he took out a phosphorous match and a small piece of wax-taper, which he ignited.

These means of procuring a light he always took care to have about him.

It is a pity he did not adopt this course earlier. If he had, it would have saved him much time, and still more uneasiness.

By the aid of the tiny flame, he found he had made a mistake, and gone to the wrong side of the wall.

With an exclamation at his own folly, he stuck the end of the wax-taper upon one of the stalls, and going to the saddles, placed them as rapidly as he could upon the horses.

He had nearly finished, when he heard a footstep, and some one call him by his name in a suppressed tone of voice.

It was Sixteen-String Jack, who, entering, assisted him to complete his task.

Then each of them taking a horse by the bridle, they led them as quietly as they could across the yard to where Turpin and King were standing.

But, let them go as quietly as they could, they could not avoid their making a slight noise.

This noise, too, was heard by the landlord and others, who were in the house, for a door was thrown open violently.

A beam of light from the passage came into the yard.

It showed the landlord the forms of his suspicious guests, with their four horses.

"Murder!" he cried. "They're off! Stop them! Fire! Where's my blunderbuss? Quick—quick! that's it! I see them! Just mounting! Take that, you wretches, and I hope it will do you good!"

As he uttered these words, the landlord pulled the trigger of large blunderbuss that had been handed to him.

There was a blinding flash of light, a loud report, and a cloud of missiles hurled above and around the highwaymen and their steeds.

CHAPTER CLXXXVIII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN FIND THE JOURNEY TO THE NORTH A VERY DANGEROUS ONE.

THE recoil of the cumbersome weapon was so great that the landlord fell backwards into the passage after firing it, and his head went such a bang against the stone flag, that it was quite awful to hear it.

By great good luck, however, neither of our friends were in the least injured by the discharge.

Mounting their steeds, and led by Claude, who had taken care to familiarize himself with the locality, they dashed into the high-road, and once more were quickly on their way to the north.

In the eastern sky there was just the least flush of light that served to show darkness and night were about to be superseded by day and light.

"Take it all through," said Claude, "during the last twelve hours, I think circumstances have turned out as vexatious as they well could."

"They have, it is true, but we must not always expect to be as fortunate as we have generally been."

"No, no; but it's all through that confounded Lieutenant Beckwith."

"Ah! he's dead now. Let him rest."

"It strikes me we have by no means heard the last of that affair. It has brought us into trouble enough already, but it will bring us into more."

"Well, it is very certain if it had not been for him we should have been on the road in advance of the stage-coach, and then it would not have mattered how much disturbance was made."

"It will make matters awkward now."

"Very awkward."

"We shall be obliged to avoid all large towns, I expect. We must look out, too, very carefully, that we are not known. I hoped the remainder of our journey would be pleasant, but there looks to me to be a strong probability of our being hunted into the Pretender's ranks."

"Hold!" said Tom King. "I must take exception to

that ward. It savours of Jacobinism. He is no pretender, but a Stuart, and consequently lawful heir to the English throne."

"Well, Tom, well be careful not to offend in future."

"Let us turn to another subject, Dick."

"Yes, my friend."

"Do not misrepresent the case, but tell us truly. What do you imagine to be the state of your wound?"

"It is very bad."

"I feared as much."

"And yet, perhaps, not so bad as you might think. It is very painful."

"You must expect that."

"It was a providential circumstance that I escaped so well as I did. Have you ever heard of a more treacherous action?"

"Never."

"While I was speaking, though, I noticed his hand in his coat pocket, and was on my guard, but he whipped out the pistol and fired it in a smaller space of time than I could have believed possible, and I only had time to make just the movement I did."

"And which most unquestionably saved your life."

"I acted fairly by him."

"You did, Dick, a great deal too fair, and I should never have suffered you to stand up against him, only I was fearful that by thwarting you I should cause too great a flow of blood to your head, which might have brought on a brain fever."

"All is well."

"Not altogether. Just think what a commotion the deeds we have done during our journey will cause. We shall never hear the last of them."

"I think every day serves to show us the absolute importance of taking our way to Prince Charles's camp, and as his followers we may yet win distinction and renown."

Claude shook his head.

"I have thought the matter very carefully over," he said, "and the result of my deliberations is this: I think he stands a very poor chance indeed of being King of England."

"Do you?"

"I do, indeed; and I think if you will only perpend the matter, you will come to the same conclusion."

"It is a matter hardly worth the discussing now, we have so many things on hand," said Turpin. "There is the Warwick coach."

"Well?"

"It cannot surely, in this short time, have so much got the start of us that we shall be unable to overtake it."

"No, no."

"Let us do so, then."

"But for what purpose?"

"Merely to pass it, because if we can do so we shall be out of all the trouble we shall be sure to get into if it is before us."

"So we shall."

"Black Bess is pretty fresh, considering the number of miles she has travelled. How do you find your cattle?"

"Equal to a good gallop of two or three miles."

"Forward, then. But hark, what is that behind us?"

A confused noise from their rear; as though a number of persons were not far off, reached their ears.

They turned instantly to see what it was.

To their surprise, a multitude of persons, armed with every imaginable weapon at all practicable for defence, some mounted on horses, others on foot, were, with fierce gesticulations, hurrying towards them.

"We may thank the landlord for that," said Turpin; "but we can afford to laugh at such a pursuit. Forward! forward!"

In obedience to these words from their leader, our three friends gave their horses a sudden impulse forward.

A loud shout—it appeared to them one of derision—came from their pursuers.

What it could mean they knew not.

It seemed silly.

And yet Dick felt a vague uneasiness creep over him.

He feared something was wrong.

Oh! could he but have seen what took place in the stable a little before Claude reached it, his heart would indeed have sunk within him, and he would have been ready to give up everything as lost.

But it was in ignorance, the reader must not remain

so, and, therefore, we return to the scene which took place upon the arrival of the Warwick mail.

There was one other person besides the landlord who heard what the guard said about the highwaymen, and the colossal reward offered for their apprehension.

There was one who was struck with the coincidence of four persons arriving there, who tallied in general description with the highwaymen.

Now, it so happened that a slight disagreement had taken place between the landlord and this ostler the day before, about a rise in his wages, which he wanted, and which his master refused to give.

Since then they had not been on such good terms as they had been formerly, or the landlord would have been the first person he would have applied to in the matter.

As it was, he determined to take the case more into his own hands, and he set off to alarm some of the villagers.

But it occurred to him that the highwaymen might take the alarm while he was absent, and be flown by the time he returned, so he thought, to prevent all accidents, he would prevent them from going far.

With this end in view, then, he ran into the stables, and, with a piece of iron used to clear obstructions out of the foot, contrived to loosen one hind shoe on the hoof of each horse, leaving it apparently secure, but yet held only, and that frailty, by two nails.

This done, he darted off, and he had scarcely got clear of the premises, than Claude entered the stable.

Not suspecting for a moment that the horses had been tampered with, we have seen how Claude led them out—how his comrades and himself mounted them, and how they reached the high-road in safety.

While they went a tolerably steady pace, the shoes kept on, but directly they set them to a gallop, off they came, one after another.

That was why those in pursuit set up the cry of derision, which had made Dick uneasy, he did not know wherefore nor at what.

They were not long, however, before they discovered what was the matter.

The discovery came upon them like a clap of thunder.

What to do, or how to act, they knew not.

To turn and fight with their pursuers, although they might in the end prove victorious, yet perhaps it would be at the sacrifice of the lives of one or more of them.

To go on would only be to lame their horses, and render them incapable of doing them service.

Truly, were they on the horns of a dilemma.

Moreover, despite the awkwardness of their position, they had but little time for reflection. Whatever course of action they might resolve to adopt, must, to be of any good at all, be adopted speedily.

And now, as if to add to their perplexities, they heard several horsemen on the road, approaching them.

They would be hemmed in between the two, for, of course, the new comers would see that something out of the usual way was taking place, and would lend their assistance to intercept them.

"We are in a dreadful fix!" said Turpin, hurriedly. And for the life of me, I cannot see my way out of it."

CHAPTER CLXXXIX.

THE HIGHWAYMEN FIND THEIR PERILS AND PERPLEXITIES ON THE INCREASE, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE BUT A SMALL DEGREE OF PROBABILITY THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY CARRY OUT THEIR UNDERTAKING.

"THERE is only one thing we can do," said Tom, "and, therefore, we must do it or give in."

"What is it?"

"Take to the meadows."

"Good! On the soft turf our cattle will not so much feel the inconvenience of being without a shoe. It is a good idea; but if it is to be of any good to us at all, we must do it at once."

"Of course."

"How?"

"Look for a gap."

"The hedge is lower here," said Claude. "Lead the way, Dick, for the love of heaven. It is the only thing we have at all resembling a chance."



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES SWEAR FEALTY TO CHARLES STUART.]

"It is," replied Turpin; "so follow me at once! There is no time to lose. The lane is full narrow for a leap, but we must do the best we can."

While he spoke these words, which he did in a very rapid tone of voice, he got as far from the hedge he was about to leap as the opposite bank would let him.

His three companions ranged themselves near him.

Then, settling himself more firmly in the saddle, Dick grasped the reins, at the same time pressing his heels against his mare's flanks to urge her onward.

With a sudden dash and a bound she was over.

The others followed in quick succession.

All alighted in perfect safety in the meadow.

But from their pursuers, who were too close behind them to be pleasant, there arose a furious cry. It seemed as though the highwaymen would triumph over the obstacle they had placed in their way, and get off altogether.

The reward, however, that was offered for their capture was so great and tempting for them to give up the pur-

suit very easily, and so, with incredible speed and utter disregard of pain, they scrambled up the bank and through the thickly-planted hedge.

But quick as they were in doing this, those of whom they were in chase had had time to cross the very large meadow in which they found themselves, and were in the act of leaping into another, whose extent was more than they could discern.

On—they went, unheeding the danger and difficulties of their route, filled—animated with the idea that, ere long, the robbers' steeds would be too lame to proceed further.

When this happened, and they hugged the belief that it could not be very long before it did, they were in sufficient force to overcome four men.

At least they thought so.

Had they known the character of our friends as well as the reader knows it, it is probable they would have been of a different opinion.

Leaving them, however, to continue their pursuit, we

will turn our attention more particularly to describing the actions of the four highwaymen, whose positions, in consequence of the ostler's trickery, was a most perilous one.

"Take it easy now," said Dick Turpin, after they had leaped into the second meadow, "only go just fast enough to keep these fellows at the distance they are."

"We shall soon tire them out."

"I think so, Claude. We will lead them a pretty dance, and were it not for the loss of the shoes, we would quickly show them a clean pair of heels."

"Curse the ostler!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "It is the most awkward thing for us that possibly could be."

"Yes, we ought to have got ahead of that coach. Now, as we go on, we shall find the whole country alarmed, and on the look-out for us."

"Confound it, yes. But we must make the best of it we can. Take care of your horses, my friends; for if they are knocked up I do not know how we are to get on, and one heavy tread on a stone will do the business."

"They are gaining on us, Dick," said Tom King, a minute or two afterwards. "I have been looking back continually, and I am sure they are a great deal nearer than they were."

At this moment there was a loud report, as though several muskets had been discharged; and this was the case.

But it was quite useless. They had much better have reserved their fire, for they were not within range of their mark by many yards.

It served, however, to show the highwaymen the necessity of maintaining a greater distance between themselves and their pursuers, who they considered must ere long give in.

But for some time they evinced no signs of anything of the kind, and the perseverance with which they kept up the chase was remarkable.

"This sort of thing won't do," said Turpin. "I fancy Bess goes slightly lame already."

"You don't mean that?"

"I am afraid it is so."

"But what are we to do?"

"Ah! that is where I am puzzled."

"So are we."

"Who were they, should you think, whom we heard coming along the road?"

"I was wondering," replied Tom King, "and that is what has made me look back so continually. I have been expecting every moment to see them make their appearance behind us."

"But you have seen nothing of them?"

"No."

"Nor I, so let us hope they went by unnoticed, or perhaps we were mistaken in the sound. But we have no leisure to speculate upon that point now, we must turn round and make a stand."

"Turn round and make a stand?"

"Yes, and ten to one if by doing so we shall not frighten our foes out of pursuing us."

"It is a hazardous plan," said Claude Duval.

"That I do not dispute; but if we continue in this way we shall knock all the hoofs off our horses, and then we shall be done for to a certainty."

"So we shall."

"Turn, then."

"We obey, captain."

"Ten to one if it does not put our enemies out more than anything else we could do would."

As he spoke all wheeled round, and then stood perfectly still.

The result was just as Dick had predicted.

The run at which the men had been coming slackened to a trot, and then a walk.

Finally they stopped altogether.

The sudden and unexpected change in tactics was more than they could exactly understand.

They were too frightened to advance.

"Charge!" cried Turpin. "Now is our chance. Charge, and they will fly before us! What a pity we did not think of it before! Charge!"

His order, extraordinary as it appeared, was obeyed.

The pursued and the pursuers now changed places, for the moment they perceived this movement, those who had kept so perseveringly upon their track, turned and fled in the utmost panic and confusion.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "On to them! on to them! Forward! forward! Death to them all! Do not let one of them escape with life!"

This was said in loud enough tones to reach the disorderly flying throng, and with the intention of intimidating them.

As Dick had said, it was a pity they had not thought of this bold plan of operations sooner, and yet, perhaps, it was all for the best. At an earlier moment it might not have produced the effect it then did.

A short time, considering the distance, served to take them to the high-road again.

Over the hedge they went headlong, each one intent only upon getting clear.

But our friends followed them no further—that is to say, they did not cross the hedge which divided the meadows from the road, since they could only have done so at the risk of seriously injuring their horses.

They, nevertheless, kept up a succession of shouts.

Down the road, in the direction of the "Old White Lion," scampered their discomfited foes, all thoroughly tired and sick of acting as amateur police-officers.

The highwaymen did not change their positions until they had watched the whole of the disorderly throng as far as the "Old White Lion."

Then, having done so, they looked at each other rather anxiously for a second or two in silence.

Their position was getting more and more complicated, and at the same time more full of peril.

Hitherto they had met with many risks and hairbreadth escapes during their journey, and when they passed through the country they were unknown; but now, wherever they went, it would be only reasonable for them to expect to find people anxiously on the look out for them, and prepared in more ways than one to insure their capture.

These words will give a summary of the thoughts that filled their minds during the brief period they looked into each other's countenances.

"What are we to do next, captain?" they asked.

"Which will be the best course to take?"

"I scarcely feel competent to say," replied Turpin.

"I do not know whether you have all forgotten the wound in my head: but if you have I have not."

"It was forgotten for a moment, Dick, and yet not altogether; but you carried things off so well that we fancied you felt nothing of it, and so thought it best policy not to recall it to your remembrance."

"I see!"

"That is exactly it. Is the pain very great?"

"Not so bad, perhaps, as it has been, nor yet so bad as might have been expected. My head feels very heavy; and every now and then there comes such a cloud over my eyes that I can hardly see; but that I shall soon get the better of, no doubt."

"You alarm me, Dick!" said Tom King, "not only by your words, but by your looks. You are as white as a ghost!"

CHAPTER CXC.

CONTINUES TO DETAIL THE ADVENTURES WHICH BEFELL THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN ON THEIR JOURNEY TO THE NORTH.

AND in good truth, any one gazing upon the countenance of the celebrated highwayman, who felt an interest in his welfare, would to the full have shared in Tom King's anxiety.

It was pale even to ghastliness, while his eyes bore a stony appearance, really dreadful to behold.

"I must shake off the feeling as well as I can, Tom," he said. "We have more important things to think about just now."

"We have," replied Claude; "and I think I can give you some little consolation. In the course of my life I have given and received a great many wounds, and the symptoms you describe are not so unfavourable as one would think at a first glance."

"Indeed."

"No, while you feel as you do you have nothing to fear, since the effect is principally produced by loss of blood, and you will soon make up for that again."

"That's all right, then; and now, my friends, let us

have the discussion of that point, and attend to others of far greater importance."

"With all my heart," said Claude. "But, under all circumstances, it will be most prudent for you to keep yourself as quiet as you can for a short time."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Leave here at once."

"Easily said."

"It will not do to stay where we are. Let us dismount. The horses, then, will get on much better."

"But what are we to do, then?"

"Find some place where we can get them shod. There is no other course."

"So be it, then. We will dismount. Let us hope we have frightened those fellows too much for them to come after us just yet!"

"Stay," said Tom King; "I will assist you down. You are not strong enough to dismount unaided. Stop, now!"

As he spoke he hastened to the side of Black Bess, and helped his friend Turpin from the saddle.

Nor were his services unwelcome. The short rest they had had at the "Old White Lion" was not enough to properly recuperate his exhausted energies; and though, in the moment of danger, excitement had enabled him to triumph over his weakness, yet, when all was over, he was more terribly prostrated than before.

He staggered slightly on reaching the ground; but, by an effort, he recovered himself.

"I must do the best I can," he said, in reply to his friends' expressed fears for his safety. "To stay where we are will be madness. The panic that has seized upon them will quickly dissipate, and then they will be upon us with fresh force."

"Even so!"

"Come on, then! Take your oridies in your hands, and creep cautiously underneath the hedge. The ground is soft, and will not hurt the horses now, having only their own weight to carry."

"And we shall not wander far out of our way," added Claude Duval, "if we take care to keep along the hedge skirting the high-road."

"I take it," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "that our greatest difficulty has yet to come."

"You mean with respect to shoeing the horses."

"I do."

"There I am of your opinion. Still, the danger and difficulty, great or little, must be faced. There must and cannot be any shrinking."

"True!"

During the whole of this brief conversation, our friends had not stood still, but pushed on as rapidly as circumstances would permit them.

Without dwelling upon their hopes and fears as expressed in their conversation, the reader will not fail to comprehend and form a due estimate of the gigantic nature of the peril with which they were threatened.

In the first place there was the dread that their late pursuers would summon up courage enough to re-attack them, and would, perhaps, bring with them an overwhelming reinforcement.

They were perfectly aware of the helpless state in which the highwaymen were, and that they could not possibly go any distance without rendering their horses quite useless.

Then there was the difficulty of finding a shoeing forge in the vicinity, and the danger they would incur during their stay there.

But, above all, there was the desperate condition of their leader; and this it was that gave the others the greatest amount of uneasiness.

Under this adverse combination of events, we shall see how far fortune favoured them.

Dick bore up bravely.

The pain he suffered was almost beyond endurance, but he made as little of it as he could.

His limbs were like lead.

But the imperative necessity of removing from their present position was foremost in his imagination, and he made all other sensations subservient to it.

No sounds to indicate that their late foes had resumed the chase reached their ears, and as minute after minute passed away, each one increasing the distance between

them, they began to indulge in the hope that they had abandoned it altogether.

Ere long, however, they saw in the distance a man crossing the meadows in a diagonal direction, which would enable him to come up with them.

By the way this man fixed his gaze upon their persons, it became perfectly clear that he intended to intercept them.

One man, however, the highwaymen did not dread, though all four looked rather curiously and anxiously towards him.

Upon a nearer approach, they perceived he was a short, stout, apoplectic-looking man, dressed in the costume of a farmer, and having on his face an expression of agricultural obstinacy and stupidity.

He carried in his hand a long double-barrelled gun, and as soon as he was certain our friends saw him, he waved it over his head in a threatening manner.

By his side walked two dogs of a very ugly and ferocious breed.

Disregarding all three of them, our friends still continued striking across the meadows.

Fortunately, however, they watched what he was about. The farmer began to shout.

At first they could not distinguish the words one from another; but presently, as the distance between them decreased, they found them to be something like the following—

"Hi! there! Stop! stop! Do you hear? Stop! It'll be the worse for you if you don't! Trespass, I say! Hi! Stop, will you? You can't go on!"

"I daresay this is the old bloke's ground," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and we are trespassing on it. Keep on. Don't take any notice. He will catch us just now."

And so he did; for observing that no heed was paid either to his words or his actions, the farmer left off shaking his gun and shouting, but changed his pace from a walk to a run instead.

In a few minutes, pausing, breathless, and exhausted, he stood before them.

"Out of the way," said Dick. "Don't interfere with us. Out of the way!"

"But I tell you there's no road this way, and you can't go any further."

"Nonsense! Can't you see that we are in the majority, and that if we chose we could toss you over the hedge! For once in your life be a sensible man, and allow us to pass unmolested, or the consequences will be anything but pleasant."

"Stop, I tell you," cried the farmer, who was quite as pig-headed as he looked. "Stop, or I fire!"

As he spoke, he planted himself before them, and raised his double-barrelled gun to his shoulder.

His two dogs were one on either side of him, and they showed their teeth and growled, and looked as defiant as their master.

Of course the highwaymen were obliged to come to a halt.

"Now then," cried the farmer, having accomplished his first intention, "turn back and be off. I don't allow no trespassers on my ground. Turn back, or I fire!"

"Turn back be banged!" said Claude Duval; and to the great astonishment of all, he made a sudden bound forward, knocked the barrel of the gun up in the air, and then wrested the weapon out of the farmer's hands.

But he had like to have paid dearly for this feat, for the two dogs we have mentioned, the moment they saw him attack their master, with a natural instinct sprang upon him.

Claude, however, could be nimble when he chose, and jumping backwards with great suddenness, he grasped the gun tightly by the barrel, and swung it round him with tremendous velocity, so that the butt-end described a circle about a foot above the ground.

In its progress it caught both dogs, as the terrific yell they uttered testified.

But although hurt—crippled, in fact—they were not disabled, and the pain they felt made them fly upon Claude with greater fury than before.

But this time he was not left to combat them single-handed. His friends Jack and Tom came to his assistance. They shot both the ferocious animals.

The farmer turned black in the face with rage, and

danced about as though in convulsions, or the agonies of strangulation.

Still, with praiseworthy courage, he would not give in until Tom, having seen Claude in safety, rushed forward, and grasping him by the collar, thrust the muzzle of a pistol into his ear.

"Silence," he said, "or it will be the worse for you! As you have seen, we are not men who will stand trifling with."

CHAPTER CXCI.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN PUT AN END TO THE INTERFERENCE OF THE FARMER.

THE farmer glared around him with some dismay, but all that he saw fully bore out the truth of what Tom King had said.

A remarkable change took place in the colour of his countenance.

From a dusky black it subsided into a nondescript whitey-brown tint.

"Mercy! mercy!" he said. "Spare my life! spare my life! I am a sinner—a miserable sinner! Spare my life!"

"Keep quiet, then," said King, "and your request will be listened to; otherwise, there will shortly be a vacancy in the agricultural districts."

At this moment Claude approached.

"What do you mean?" he asked, threateningly. "What do you mean by treating gentlemen in the manner you have treated us! What do you mean by telling gentlemen to stop, and that they cannot go through your fields? What do you mean by it?"

"Trepas!" cried the farmer, recovering himself a little. "Trepas! that's what it is! This is my ground, I'd have you know."

"Be quiet!" said Tom King, as he pressed the muzzle of the pistol yet harder against the farmer's ear. "Claude," he added, "I want a word with you."

Duval approached, and Tom whispered something in his ear.

A nod and a pleased expression of countenance was the reply, and then Claude spoke to Dick and Sixteen-String Jack.

"Tom has hit upon a capital idea," he said.

"What is it?"

"He proposes, by dint of threats, to compel the farmer to take us to some place where we can have our horses shod."

"Capital!"

"And make him give out that we are particular friends of his."

"Good!" said Turpin; "and so, inopportune as his presence seemed, we shall be able to turn it over to our own advantage."

"I hope so."

In the meantime, Tom had explained his purpose to the farmer.

"Do you wish to live?" he asked, "or are you quite weary of life? If the latter, I will put you out of the world at once. If the former, I will tell you how to remain a little longer in it."

"Spare me! Spare my life!" cried the farmer, in the utmost alarm. "I will do anything if you will only spare my life."

"Spoken like a reasonable man. Your life shall be spared."

"But what am I to do?"

"Obey me in all things for the next hour, and then you shall be free to do whatever you think proper. Otherwise—"

Tom had no occasion to complete the sentence.

"I will obey—I will obey. But tell me what I have to do."

"In one moment. Here, Dick!"

His three comrades advanced.

"He is quite reasonable, and has promised to obey me in all things."

"Then," said Turpin, sternly, "see that he does so."

"I will—I will, indeed, gentlemen," said the farmer, who, ever since the loss of his gun and the death of his dogs, had been in a perfect fright; "only tell me what I have to do."

"We will. Do you know a place where I can get a shoe put on my horse?"

"A blacksmith's forge?"

"Yes."

"Oh! gentlemen, if that is all you require, I can tell you where to find one."

"Then I should advise you to."

"I will—I will. There is one on my own farm—this very farm."

"Have you really?"

"Yes."

"Lead us to it, then, and understand this, and believe us perfectly in earnest."

"Yes, gentlemen. Oh! yes."

"Lead us to this smithy. I am rather weak, and will take hold of your arm. So. My friends will walk just behind us with pistols ready in their grasp, and the least thing they see that looks like treachery on your part, or hesitation to do as you are bidden, will be the signal for them to fire, and, as you have witnessed, they know how to use a pistol."

While speaking, Dick slipped his hand under the farmer's arm, and held it tightly.

The other three took up their positions a little in the rear, with their right hands in their coat pockets, grasping a pistol.

"Forward!" cried Dick. "We are going to let you off lightly, and you ought to be grateful accordingly. If you will have some shoes put on our horses, we will let you go free and unharmed, and pay you a reasonable sum for your trouble and the damage we have done."

The moment Dick spoke of payment, the farmer's manner entirely changed.

They did not know it then, but he was avaricious in the extreme.

"Come this way, gentlemen," he said; "you need not trouble about your pistols, I am your very obedient servant to command. This way, if you please. I see now you are gentlemen, and I am sorry any disagreement arose between us, but really such a many common people come—"

"That will do—that will do," cried Turpin; "lead on in silence, and bear what we have said in mind. Treachery will only provoke your death. It will not be possible for you to escape."

The farmer was silent, and led the highwaymen across several fields, until, in the distance, some thatched roofs were discernible.

These he soon after reached.

From the one to which they first came issued a bright light, and the clanking of hammers and anvils.

They found, too, that they approached this shed from the back, and that the front of it looked out upon a broad high-road, though not the one our friends had so long been travelling.

"Jackson!" cried the farmer, as they reached the large door of the smithy. "Jackson!"

In obedience to this call, a burly smith came forward.

Our friends kept a keen look out upon both, having fully determined to punish the farmer severely should he prove treacherous.

But all seemed well.

"Good morning, Mr. Bates," said Jackson, with that servile respect so noticeable in farming districts. "What can I do for you?"

Mr. Bates, somewhat to the highwaymen's surprise, spoke quite freely.

"These gentlemen want their horses' shoes seen to at once."

"All right, sir."

"Make haste," said Turpin; "we are pressed for time."

"Do you hear, Jackson," said Mr. Bates; "the gentleman says he is pressed for time."

Dick looked upon the farmer in wonder. He could scarcely believe it possible that so great a change could have taken place in a person in so short a time.

But he did not know how dominant a passion love of money was in the farmer's soul, and that he would hardly have scrupled at any means, however base, to obtain it.

Claude Duval was suspicious, and watched his every movement with the greatest attention.

"Do they all four want attending to?" asked Jackson.

"Yes," replied Dick. "I want the old shoes taken off and new ones placed on them all."

"Very good, sir. I'll take yours first."

"Do so," said Turpin. "Be gently with her, for she has a rare spirit, or temper rather, if you are in the least rough."

The blacksmith led Turpin's mare into the shed, and secured her head.

Then began his work.

"You have lost a shoe," he said.

"Yes, put a new one on carefully. Her hoof will be tender."

"So it will, sir."

"It will take a good while, gentlemen," said Mr. Bates, "to put sixteen shoes on. Don't stand here, I beg, but come up to the house."

"No, thank you," replied our hero, promptly. "I am much obliged to you all the same, but I would rather stand by and see the shoeing done."

"Just as you like, gentlemen; and while we are waiting we may as well settle about the little recompense you spoke of."

"Very good," said Turpin. "What harm have we done?"

"There's my two dogs."

"Yes."

"And my gun."

"Go on."

"And the trespass, and the time"—

"Never mind," said Dick, "going on any further. I'll tell you what, when your man has shod the horses properly, you shall have five guineas from each of us."

"Five guineas? Yes, gentlemen—your lordships, I mean. Five and five is ten, and five is fifteen, and five is twenty. Did you mean twenty guineas altogether, my lord?"

"Exactly," replied Dick.

The farmer rubbed his hands together.

Covetousness sparkled in his eyes.

"You're welcome, your lordships," he said, "to come on my grounds whenever you think proper. Of course, I did not know you, or I should not have acted as I did. I'm very sorry. Why, my dogs, Towler and Snap, might have bit one of your lordships!"

"Very probably."

In such like conversation as this was the time passed away while Black Bess was shod.

It was not that she exactly required a new set, but Dick thought, and wisely too, that he would take the present opportunity and have them all done—for it might be a very long time indeed before another such chance befel him.

CHAPTER CXCLII.

A CART IS DRIVEN UP TO THE OLD SMITHY; WHICH EVENT HAS THE EFFECT OF OPENING THE EYES OF MR. BATES.

"WHY, I'm blest!" said Jackson, suddenly, who, having finished Bess, had begun upon Claude's horse, "why this one has cast a shoe too."

"We are aware."

"Their lordships are aware, Jackson," roared the farmer, in a rage with his dependant for making the remark: "go on with your work."

Thus rebuked, Jackson went on.

Presently Claude's horse was done.

Our friends' hearts grew lighter. They were glad to give twenty pounds for such an important service as that was. Just at that moment the value of it was incalculable.

Jackson took Tom King's horse in exchange for Claude's.

The circumstance of the off-hand shoes of two horses being off at the same time filled him with astonishment, and he looked upon the highwaymen and Mr. Bates inquiringly.

But from the looks of neither could he gather anything.

It was really amusing to see the way in which he examined the feet of Tom's horse.

He began with the fore ones.

Then took the near hind leg.

All three shoes were worn, but quite perfect, and fit to do a great deal more service.

Slowly he picked up the other foot.

He let it down with a dab.

The shoe was gone.

This seemed to Jackson mysterious and incomprehensible, and the manner in which he looked at the horses and their riders was ludicrous in the extreme.

However, he did not dare make any remark, but went on with his work.

In time, Tom's horse was finished.

Then there remained only Sixteen-String Jack's to do.

As before, Jackson looked at the feet, and just in the same order.

He lifted up the last one, thinking surely all four shoes would not be short.

But they were.

Letting go the hoof, and braving the anger of his master he stood up.

His astonishment was too great for him to contain his words.

"This caps all!" he cried, "clean caps all! There's four horses brought to the forge at the same time, and, as I'm alive, they have all four cast the same shoe!"

This circumstance seemed to strike Mr. Bates as being a most peculiar one, and he looked up at our friends with undisguised curiosity.

"It's all right," said Dick, for he thought no harm could be done by trying to account for the matter. "You see it's been done for a wager."

"It's been done for a wager, Jackson," cried Mr. Bates, who seized upon this idea with the greatest avidity.

"Get on with your work, do. Their lordships know all about it. It's been done for a wager."

Half satisfied, Jackson resumed his work.

The time altogether that it took to put on the shoes was something considerable, and the day was far advanced before they were all finished.

At last, however, the horses were led out into the road in front of the shed, rubbed down, and given a mouthful of hay and water.

Mr. Bates, too, finding our friends would not, on any account, be persuaded to leave their horses, had had some refreshments brought out to them.

It was just at this moment that there came round the corner of the high-road a horse and cart.

Two men were seated in it, and driving at a very rapid rate.

But they drew up exactly in front of the smithy.

It was by no means part of the highwaymen's plan to draw attention to themselves, and therefore they remained just as they were, thinking that the best means of eluding observation.

A man was rubbing down their steeds, and they were standing close by, with Mr. Bates, watching him at his work.

Upon the stoppage of the cart, all looked up to see what kind of people it contained.

One was a man, and the other a youth of about eighteen or nineteen.

"Hullo!" said the former, as he scrambled rather awkwardly out of his vehicle. "Who belongs to this place?"

"I do," said Mr. Bates, stepping forward, and desirous of showing his authority to his visitors. "What do you want?"

"Perhaps you'll be kind enough to look at that, and, with your permission, I'll make use of one or two."

The man thrust a printed paper into the hands of Mr. Bates as he spoke.

Then, without waiting to hear what he said, he ran back to the cart, and produced a paste-pot.

Mr. Bates unfolded the bill.

"The devil!" cried Dick Turpin, as he saw all this. Mount, my friends! It's another of those infernal bill-stickers!"

It was in a suppressed voice that he spoke, but still it was loud enough for those to whom he addressed himself to hear it.

A glance showed them that what their leader had said was perfectly right; so with that ease and dexterity which long and continual practice had given them, they sprang into their saddles.

Nor were they a moment too soon.

Mr. Bates, who had unfolded the bill, and begun the attempt to decipher it, looked up with amazement upon this sudden movement upon the part of our four friends.

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Ere he could speak, however, something else occurred which changed the whole posture of affairs.

The boy in the cart—for he was little more—had of course made himself acquainted with the description given of the four highwaymen.

His eyes had rested upon the horsemen close at hand.

Of course he recognised them instantly; and whatever doubts he had were dispelled when he saw the celebrated mare Black Bess.

Therefore, as soon as the man came to the cart for the purpose of reaching out some bills, he communicated his suspicions to him.

A glance served to show the bill-sticker that his assistant was right; so, standing up on the shaft of his cart, he shouted—

"Stop thief! Two thousand pounds reward! Two thousand five hundred pounds for those four men on horseback! Dick Turpin, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack. Stop them!"

From the insight the reader has already been given of the character of Mr. Bates, the electrical effect which the mention of this enormous sum had upon him can be readily enough imagined.

But he was too dumfounded to speak.

As for the highwaymen, they were quite at their ease.

To be sure, they were in such peril as would alarm most men, but all things are comparative; and in comparison with the difficulties they had been in such a short time previously, the present was a mere nothing.

At least they thought so, if one might judge by the easy way in which they took it.

At a sign from Dick they rode forward with great suddenness.

Mr. Bates, who made a wild and maniacal attempt to stop them, was thrown down.

And Sixteen-String Jack, as they passed the cart, gave the bill-sticker, who was still standing rather precariously upon the shafts, a vigorous push, which had the effect of sending him backwards over his horse at once.

This done, they increased the speed of their horses, and swept along the road, leaving Mr. Bates and the discomfited bill-sticker to console themselves as best they might.

In less than ten minutes afterwards, during which time they had torn along at their utmost speed, they drew up.

So rapidly and strangely had the last few events fallen out, that they could hardly bring themselves to believe in their reality.

But the necessity for proceeding with the utmost circumspection pressed itself upon them.

Altogether, they had been delayed something like eighteen hours, which would enable the news to get well spread abroad respecting them, and as for hoping to overtake the Warwick mail, that was quite out of the question.

But in other respects their position was materially improved.

Their horses were well shod and thoroughly rested.

They had no foes to dread upon their track.

By mutual agreement they proceeded at a good sharp pace, keeping a keen look-out for any indications of their enemy.

But none such came in sight.

The rest at the smithy, too, had another good effect, and that was Turpin's wound.

This ugly gash, as it appeared, was in reality nothing—that is, it would have been nothing, had he kept still, and received proper attention; but, as the reader knows, he had neither one nor the other.

They quickly found, however, by his manner, that he was much better, and Claude Duval presaged that, ere long, he would feel nothing of it.

And so, in company, they pressed on together, avoiding the main roads, and all towns and villages, sleeping in the open air, and managing in the best way they could.

Indeed, had they not adopted such means as these, their discovery would have been certain, so well and skilfully were plans laid for their capture.

Then, with respect to the expedition they had taken in hand, it was most unquestionably the best thing they could do, for while the same supervision was continued to be exercised upon the different roads, they would be quite debarred from pursuing their avocation.

Besides this, it had that to recommend it which is needed in all things, and that is variety.

OUR FRIENDS REACH SCOTLAND IN SAFETY, AND MAKE A HALT AT PERTH, AT THE "MORAY ARMS," WHERE DICK TURPIN HAS A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

FIVE days after the occurrence of the events we have just related, four horsemen, whose apparel was torn and travel-soiled in many places, and whose steeds evinced by their gait a fatigue of no common order, drew rein before a small roadside public-house in the vicinity of Perth.

It is scarcely necessary to tell the reader who those four horsemen were. He knows already they are those in whose varying fortunes and exciting adventures we feel so deep an interest.

During those five days their journey had been undiversified by any incidents worthy of special mention. They had been careful to go by the most unfrequented roads, and had succeeded in escaping observation.

But the time will show that they had not dallied much upon their journey. In fact, with the exception of such brief halts as nature imperatively demanded, they had not stayed once during the whole journey.

But now, having come so far in safety, they felt in tolerable security, and resolved, let the result be what it would, that they would remain for the rest of the day, and during the night, at a public-house, about two miles from Perth, and on the high-road leading from it.

It is at this moment that we again present them to the reader.

The countenances of all are haggard, and show the immense fatigue which they have undergone.

The wound in Turpin's head, thanks to the close attention Claude paid to it, and despite all adverse circumstances, was quite well.

But he was far from looking the man he had done a short time before, though a good rest would soon put all that right.

It was in the latter part of a winter afternoon that they halted before the door of the public-house here alluded to, and which was known by the sign of the "Moray Arms."

They met with rather a cold reception from the occupiers of the house, who, from the fact of their all wearing the highland costume, they conjectured were high Scotch, who, at that time, were much prejudiced against the English, or Southrons, as they called them.

Of course, the dress which our friends wore showed them to belong to this latter nation, and to that they ascribed the cold reception they received.

They called for a private room, and a dinner of the best they could procure, and while they were getting it in readiness the highwaymen, as usual, paid a visit to the stables, conciliated the ostler, and saw their steeds properly groomed and fed.

No account of their exploits seemed to have reached so far north, and upon this they congratulated themselves, for they not only required rest, but desired to enter the Pretender's ranks as though they had come there of their own accord, and not selected it as a place of refuge from their foes.

On their return they were shown to a small and comfortable apartment—at least, it seemed such to our friends, who had been deprived of such a luxury for some time.

Here they dispatched a very hearty meal.

Abundance of wine had been placed upon the table, and, at the conclusion of the repast, Tom King filled a bumper, and, standing up, said—

"Now, my friends, fill up your glasses, and drink to the health of Prince Charlie and his father, King James!"

Some portion of Tom's enthusiasm had infused itself into the breasts of his three comrades; so, standing up, they responded to the toast with great warmth.

The conversation, of course, turned upon their mode of future procedure.

So far, they had come in a straight line, without any deviation as to the exact locality of the Pretender and his army, and although they had made numberless direct or indirect inquiries, they were unable to gather a notion of his whereabouts.

But it is not to be wondered at that they were unsuccessful in this respect, for those of whom they made inquiries doubted their sincerity, and feared they were no other than English spies, nor would all their asseverations tend in the least to dispel this erroneous idea.

The only thing they had to guide them was that an engagement had taken place between the rebels and the king's troops under the command of Captain Scott, at a place called Loch Lochy, not far from Invergarry, and in which encounter the Young Pretender's army proved triumphantly victorious.

Towards this place, then, they had directed their steps. The papers, which it will be remembered Tom King had taken from the wallet of the messenger, no doubt contained the information they were in search of, but, as all were carefully sealed and tied up, Tom would not listen to any proposition to making themselves acquainted with their contents.

On the present occasion the point was rather warmly contested by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, who both maintained they should be doing no more than right by opening the papers.

But they had not the respectful feeling for the young prince that Tom had, for he looked up to him as his lawful sovereign, and considered that to do such a thing would be to commit an unpardonable offence.

As for Turpin, he remained neuter, leaving them to settle the affair between them.

But Tom was firm.

At length, however, as night was drawing in, and the necessity for rest made itself more and more apparent, they desired to be shown to their chambers.

The landlord—an old highlander he seemed—replied to their summons, and reluctantly proceeded to obey their bidding.

But, perhaps, thinking from the appearance of the highwaymen that it would be best to keep on friendly terms with them, he subdued this feeling as much as possible, and led the way up stairs.

The inn was a substantial building and of tolerable size.

The first floor was passed, and the second flight of stairs ascended.

Then our friends were shown into two bed-chambers adjoining each other.

Here they divided in their usual fashion—that is to say, Dick Turpin and Tom King—Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

Those only who can obtain proper rest at long and uncertain intervals can form a just idea of the pleasure with which the highwaymen laid down.

In five minutes all slumbered soundly, but not knowing what might occur, they had only partially divested themselves of their apparel.

Their chamber doors they had carefully secured.

These precautions taken, they surrendered themselves to sleep.

About four hours afterwards, Dick Turpin, after a few restless movements, awoke.

He lay profoundly still, for he was at a loss rather to think where he was.

Darkness of the blackest character environed him, but, after a little while, he became conscious that some few rays of light must find their way in from somewhere, as he began dimly to see surrounding objects.

As he lay there in perfect stillness, his ears were assailed by a strange murmuring sound.

It arose suddenly and as suddenly ceased.

Then it broke forth again, and continued uninterruptedly.

He could not have been properly awake and in full possession of his senses, or he would have recognised the sound much sooner than he did.

At last, however, he aroused himself thoroughly, and, sitting up in the bed, listened.

"Voices," he muttered. "What can that mean? There are a great many, too. What time is it, I wonder? Late. Long past midnight, I should think. It is danger. And yet, perhaps, it is not. However, I will not awake my comrades until I have ascertained."

With this Turpin slipped quietly off the bed, and standing upon the floor, listened.

He quickly discovered that the sound of the voices came from below.

As soon as he had assured himself such was the case, he, with the greatest care and secrecy, laid himself down at full length, and placed his ear to the floor.

The murmuring of voices became much more distinct,

but he could not so much as catch a single word of what was said.

But the more he thought, and the longer he listened, the more uneasy he became.

What could be the nature of the conference taking place at that dead hour of the night?

It was only natural that he should connect it with himself.

He rose to his feet, and, as he did so, formed a hasty resolution.

He would not wake his companions, but alone go forth and learn whether there really was or was not danger.

Accordingly, he, with great speed, put on the remainder of his clothes, and looked carefully to his weapons.

But it was more to his sense of feeling that he trusted than his sight when he tried the priming of his pistol.

Then, with his sword drawn in his hand, in readiness for any attack, he crept on tiptoe across the room, in the direction of the door, which, being of old oak, stood out clearly defined from the white-washed wall around it.

He had himself secured the door, and, therefore, was able to set about unfastening it noiselessly.

This he succeeded in doing, and, as, when he ascended, he had taken very particular notice of his route, he was able to find his way to the head of the stairs in the dark, without coming into collision with anything.

On the landing the voices could be heard with much greater plainness than they could in the room.

Not pausing, however, Dick Turpin stealthily commenced the descent of the stairs.

It took him a long time, considering the distance, but at last he reached the first floor.

As he got lower and lower, the more distinctly could he hear the mysterious voices.

And now he noticed that, from underneath one of the room doors on the right-hand side of where he stood, there came a broad beam of light.

That, doubtless, then, was the room in which the conference was taking place.

Cautiously he approached the door.

Then, stooping down, he put his ear close to the key-hole.

But scarcely had he done so, than the door was suddenly thrown open, and a loud ejaculation came from a man's lips.

CHAPTER CXCI

THE HIGHLAND CHIEFS ASSUME A MENACING ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE HIGHWAYMEN.

THE opening of the door was so unexpected by Dick Turpin, that he was a minute before he could recover himself, and he half fell over the threshold of the room.

But, ere he could quite reach the floor, the owner of the voice which had uttered the exclamation stooped down and clutched him by the collar.

There was a hurried movement of many feet, and a hubbub of voices.

When Dick drew himself up to his full height and looked around him, he found he was surrounded by a number of stalwart, well-armed men, who, by their attire, were evidently above the common breed.

The person who held Dick in his grasp was a noble-looking Scotchman, dressed in the costume of the chiefs of one of the highland clans.

Several others he noted wore similar apparel.

"Close the door," said a voice, in loud, commanding tones, "and we will see what curious knave has dared to pry into our counsels."

"I am no knave," cried Dick, who by this time realized his position. "Stand back, gentlemen, or it will be the worse for you. I am well armed."

As he spoke Dick waved his ponderous sword around his head.

Instinctively those who were nearest to him drew back. But it was only for a moment.

Uttering a shrill fierce cry, they drew their claymores from their sheaths and rushed upon him.

Before they quite hemmed him in, however, Dick drew a pistol with his left hand and fired—taking care to point the weapons above the heads of those surrounding him.

He knew it would have the effect of arousing his comrades, and quickly bringing them to his rescue.

"A southern spy!" cried the highlanders, fiercely. "A southern spy! Down with him! Slay him! or his assistants will be upon us! Death to the spy! Death—death!"

Dick met the onslaught that was made upon him with the greatest coolness and skill.

With a truly marvellous dexterity, he parried the numberless blows made at him from all sides.

"Hold, gentlemen!" he cried. "Hold—hold! Hear me speak. I am no spy! Hear me, hear me! and then slay me afterwards."

"Yes, hold!" said a voice, full of rich music, gentleness, and strength. "Hold, my friends; we will hear what the southerner has to say, but keep an eye upon him!"

The command was instantaneously obeyed.

Dick turned towards the speaker, for he judged he must be one high in command over the others.

But, ere he could address him, there was the hasty tramping of footsteps; and, a moment afterwards, the door of the apartment was burst open, and Tom King, followed closely by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, rushed in.

"Ha! betrayed!" cried the highlanders, as they perceived this. "Down with the dogs! down with the southerners! They are spies upon us, and our lives are no longer safe."

"Hold!" said the voice which had before spoken; "hold!"

It is impossible to convey an idea of the tone in which this word was uttered; but it had its effect upon all, even upon the three highwaymen.

They, like the rest, obeyed.

"Guard the door!" said the voice again, "and then we will question these intruders."

The men drew back, leaving the four friends in the centre of the apartment.

They stood closely to each other.

The scene was one of rare picturesque beauty.

The room in which they stood was spacious, and the ceiling lofty.

Round the walls, placed in tin sconces, were a number of wax candles, and these diffused a brilliant light, dispersing the darkness in the most distant corners.

In the centre, as we have already said, stood our four friends.

Grouped round them were about twenty distinguished-looking highland soldiers, each one the chief of a clan.

There was sufficient difference between them for any one to have told that.

But apart from the rest, and facing our friends, was the tall noble-looking chieftain, whose commands had been so scrupulously obeyed.

Who he was, neither of our friends had the least idea.

"Speak!" he said, "and be careful how you reply. Who are you, and why are you here?"

"Will you allow me to reply?" asked Tom King, making a step forward as he spoke.

"Yes; if you will be truthful."

"Do not doubt that, my lord. If I mistake not, you are of those who would rather see a Stuart on the throne of Great Britain than a Hanoverian."

"Proceed! That matters not."

"My lord, it does. All depends upon it."

"How so?"

"Whether we are friends or enemies."

"Friends or enemies?"

"Even so."

"Answer our question first," said the chieftain. "We have a right to demand it. Who are you?"

"Friends to Prince Charlie and his father, King James."

"Spies—spies!" interrupted several voices. "Spies—spies! They are southerners. Down with them."

The chieftain raised his hand.

The action, simple as it was, yet seemed so majestic, that the rude and violent men there present immediately obeyed it.

"Hold!" he said. "We will ask them for some proof of what they say."

Then turning towards Tom King, he continued—

"Your answer does not satisfy us. You wear the garb of those hostile to the cause you profess adherence to. But explain first, how it was one of your number was listening at the door during our secret councils?"

A murmur of assent followed this question, which, as

the reader must be aware, was one to which Tom King was unable to reply.

But Dick was ready.

"I alone can explain that!" he said; "and I beg you will listen to me in patience. Last afternoon we arrived, and put up here. We have journeyed from England, and have been pursued as far as the borders by those who would gladly have taken our lives. But we eluded them, and were fortunate enough to reach here in safety, and, so far as we could tell, unperceived. The remainder is simple. The chamber in which I slept is immediately over this. I was awake by the murmuring of voices. Fearful that it might be our enemies who had discovered us, I listened more intently, but still could hear no more than I had at first. The sounds came from below, and I resolved to ascertain whether our enemies were at hand or not. Accordingly I dressed myself hastily, and, taking my sword in my hand, crept down the stairs, and just reached yonder door as some one opened it. The rest you know. The pistol I fired was the signal to bring my friends to my assistance."

Dick spoke so calmly, and the whole bore such an impress of truth upon it, that the Scottish chieftains were all but convinced.

But still, with that pertinacity for which they are celebrated, they clung to the idea they had at first formed—namely, that they were English spies, and they were not willing to be disabused of it.

"Your speech is plausible," said the tall chieftain, who was evidently the head of the assembly. "But beyond doing so very vaguely, you have not told us who you are, nor by whom, nor for what you were pursued."

"Nor can we do so," replied Turpin, "that is a piece of knowledge we have determined, at all hazards, to keep to ourselves."

There was another threatening movement after this speech, but the chief stayed it.

Turpin continued,—

"But from your dress, and the fact of your having chosen this lonely and unlikely spot for a secret council, I gather that you are partizans of King James, and, under that belief, I do not hesitate to say that we are of the same faction. Moreover, too, that our journey here was for the purpose of joining his army."

"Gentlemen," said the chieftain, "if what you say is true, then no one will be so pleased to take you by the hand. If you prove false, and traitors, mine shall be the first claymore drawn to slay you."

"We have no fear. We have but little proof of the sincerity of our words, but I may state that two of us are personally acquainted with the young prince, and it was upon the occasion of our parting that we promised, so soon as the intelligence should reach us that he had planted his standard upon Scottish soil, we would hasten to place ourselves beneath his standard, and do battle for him as best we might."

"It should be stated also," said Tom King, "that we were fortunate enough to render him a service, and in token of it he gave each of us a ring, and which was to be the means by which he would recognise us at a future date."

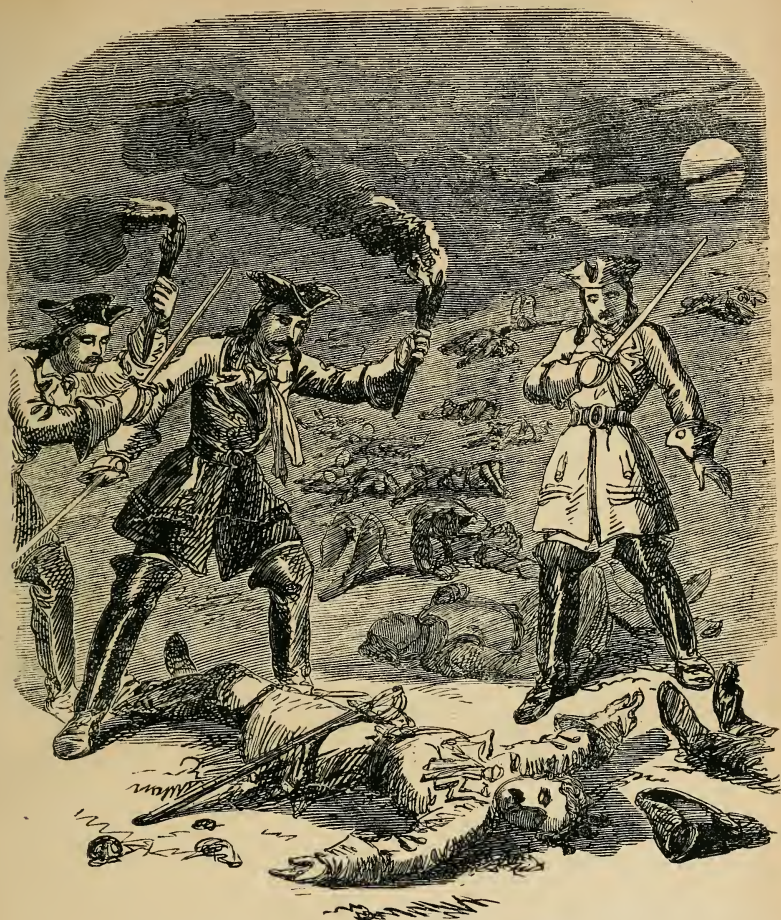
So saying, Tom King drew off the ring which Prince Charles had given him, and, with a graceful bow, presented it to the chieftain, who examined it with the closest attention, while the dense throng of Highland warriors looked on with curiosity and eagerness.

"I know this ring," said the chieftain; "and so far what they say is carried out by proof. Whether all is true is more than I could take upon myself to decide."

"We will give you our words," said Turpin;—"and, among gentlemen, that ought to be sufficient."

"These are troublous times," said an aged man, solemnly, "and times when all should be distrusted. Our lives, our fortunes are in the balance, and it behoves us to be extremely cautious, when so much is at stake. If what these gentlemen now say is true, they cannot object to what I now propose, which is, that they shall remain with us under guard, and accompany us to the meeting place agreed upon, where, if what they say is true, all will be well; if false, they shall meet with the death that such black liars and base traitors best deserve. Are you agreed?"

A unanimous "We are!" came from the lips of all present.



[THE BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL IS DISCOVERED ON THE BATTLE FIELD.]

"We are willing to abide by your decision," said Turpin; "for all we desire is to reach with all speed possible the young prince's ranks."

"We go at once, then," said the tall, noble chieftain, who, by his mildness and gentlemanly bearing, presented a strong contrast to the wild spirits by whom he was surrounded.

CHAPTER CXCV.

CAMERON OF LOCHIEL AND HIS TROOPS ESCORT OUR FRIENDS TO THE VALE OF GLENFINNAN, THE RENDEZVOUS OF THE CLANS.

THE bare outline we have given of this chieftain's manner and appearance, will enable those who are conversant with Scottish history to immediately recognise him.

It was the gallant Cameron of Lochiel.

His name and fame have descended to us in many a romance, drama, and ballad; and his unfortunate fate is deplored by all.

From his unvarying kind behaviour he had gained the title of the "Gentle Lochiel," and yet he was perhaps the most powerful chieftain in the highlands.

It was unquestionably to the temperateness of his disposition, and the respect in which he was held by those who had assembled at the secret council, that our four friends owed their lives. Had he not interposed, the highlanders would have annihilated them in the blind fury of their rage.

It would seem that the little public-house at which our friends had halted had been selected as the meeting-place for the heads of the various clans, in order to take council as to their proceedings.

It was not, however, until some time afterwards that our friends learned this.

The meeting was just over as Dick descended the stairs, and the one who opened the door was about to depart, in order to ascertain, as a precautionary measure, that there were no spies lurking about.

Our hero was certainly found in a very suspicious

situation, and one, under the circumstances, that would have justified those present in taking some very summary proceedings.

As it was, they were desired to deliver up their weapons, while a band escorted them to see that no treachery was attempted.

To all this Tom King cheerfully enough assented, out not so the others. Grumbling, however, would have done not the slightest good, and so they were compelled to submit.

They were, however, permitted to mount their own steeds, and the whole party then set out.

The journey was a long, and, in consequence of the nature of the ground, a most fatiguing one.

On their way, they were joined continually by large bodies of men, each one composing the clan of one of the chiefs who had assembled at the "Moray Arms."

Lochiel led the van, closely followed by the other Camerons.

Ere two days had elapsed, our friends had succeeded in quite gaining the confidence of their guards, so that their arms were restored to them; but, notwithstanding, they continued to keep close to them, and had the highwaymen wished to escape, they would have found it very difficult, if not impossible.

They learned, however, that the place to which they were repairing was the Vale of Glenfinnan, which had been appointed as a general rendezvous for those who favoured King James.

It was here that they were going to meet the young prince.

A bright sun was shining in a perfectly clear blue sky, upon the morning when the party reached their destination.

Their numbers had continually increased, and they now counted numbers of eight hundred men, all highlanders—or nearly so—inured to every imaginable privation, strong, well armed, and ready for any deed, however desperate.

It was a grand and imposing spectacle, for those who were there to see it, when the highland troops, in tartan array, commenced the descent into the valley.

The sun had dispersed the mists which at that time of year hung generally over and around that spot; and, as they slowly wound down that narrow path, our friends gazed with undisguised admiration upon the scene before them.

Glenfinnan is a narrow vale, in which the river Finnan runs between lofty and craggy mountains. At its extremity is Loch Ghieil, a lake upwards of fourteen miles in length; and it is this beautiful sheet of diaphanous water, in which the rugged mountain peaks and the blue sky are duplicated, which gives the valley the grand and magnificent appearance which it wears.

But the centre of the peaceful glen was now occupied by soldiers, who, from where they stood, perceived the approach of their friends, and hailed them with loud cries of joyous welcome.

The total change of scene which this presented to the highwaymen was, of course, not without its charm, and they were prepared to enter with full spirit into the new mode of life open to them.

And if the reader will reflect upon past events he will not feel surprised that they should begin to tire of their latter mode of life, which had but few agreeables and a myriad perils.

Above all, was this the case with Tom King. His history, which we have given in a former chapter, will serve to show that he had been, by a strange series of events, forced to seek a living upon the highway; it was not, as with many, from pure choice.

And now he was tired of the life he had been leading. When he looked back to the fearfully narrow escape of his life he had had at Tyburn, and remembered the horrors of that morning, it was always with a deep and unshakable shudder.

No wonder.

By birth, education, and breeding, Tom King was a gentleman, and up to his majority always looked forward to being one for the remainder of his days.

The sudden appearance of his father's unrecognized son, and the result of the trial, had dispersed all these hopes.

And yet Tom did not like the idea of continuing to sink lower and lower down in life. Pain would be have

abandoned his exciting career, despite the pleasure attaching to it; and in the present insurrection he had but one chance that in the event of the Stuarts proving victorious, he should stand a chance of regaining the estates which had been wrested from him.

There were many who flocked to the Pretender's standard from the same reason.

At any rate, as he had before repeatedly said, they could not worse their position, let things turn out as they would.

But in his own mind he took a far more sanguine glance at the prospect in the future. He was, in fine, enthusiastic in the cause he had espoused, and already saw the Hanoverian swept from English soil, and either the Pretender or his son seated on the British throne.

Then, for himself and his friends, the prospect was, if possible, more cheering still. Already he saw all four high in the estimation of their sovereign—filling honourable situations—their past offences against the laws forgotten and condoned.

Whether things eventuated in the manner he anticipated can only be seen in time, by tracing the course of the different incidents as they arose.

At any rate, they were about to enter upon quite a new phase of existence—quite new to all of them, except Claude Duval, who, it was believed, had fought under the French flag.

At length the bottom of the mountain pass was reached; and here, by the orders of their commander, the gentle Lochiel, they halted, and formed into two lines, each line being three men deep.

Between the two lines, without their arms, walked those prisoners whom they had captured in the various skirmishes they had had with the regular troops upon their route.

And now, looking in advance, our friends perceived Prince Charles, in a semi-highland dress, standing upon a slight eminence in the centre, surrounded by his most trusted adherents, who waved their caps as the soldiers approached.

The scene was one of the greatest possible animation, nor was the additional enlivenment of martial music wanting, for the bagpipes made the air vocal with their spirit-stirring notes.

In a short time the detachments of troops were arranged in a circle round the eminence upon which the young prince stood, with his head uncovered, returning the salutations of the chieftains, and responding to the hearty "Deochs laint an Reogh" of the men, which was very good Erse for "God Save the King."

Seeing himself at last surrounded by what had the outward appearance of an army, the heart of the young prince grew light within his breast. From the time he had left the shores of France he had met with nothing but disappointments, and though this is hardly the place, yet we cannot refrain from enumerating a few of them.

For motives best known to themselves, the French promised to afford the Young Pretender all the assistance, both in the shape of troops and pecuniary supplies, that lay in their power.

Upon the faith of this, and backed by the repeated invitations of the Earl of Mar, Lord Lovat, and other powerful Scottish noblemen, the Young Pretender embarked on board a ship of war of 18 guns, which was joined off Belleisle by the *Elizabeth* and other ships.

On their way to Scotland, however, they were unlucky enough to fall in with a British man-of-war, the *Lion*, commanded by Captain Brett, who immediately bore down upon the *Elizabeth*, the crew of which defended themselves with the greatest valour and resolution; and although, in the end, they obtained a victory over the English ship, it was at the destruction of nearly all their own ships, and the *Elizabeth* was totally disabled; but she managed, after incredible difficulty, to get back to Brest.

This was a serious blow to the Pretender's enterprise. Not only did it render those he had with him dissatisfied, but the loss was very great, as the *Elizabeth* carried, besides arms and ammunition for several thousand men, nearly four hundred thousand pounds sterling.

But, undismayed by this disaster, the gallant young prince continued on his way to Scotland, where he landed on the Isle of Skye.

And now he met with a fresh disappointment. The

French suddenly backed out of the affair—or virtually so—leaving him resourceless on a hostile shore.

The consequence of this disaffection of the French was, that many of the powerful noblemen, upon whose representations and fidelity he had relied, fell off also.

But, undaunted where many would have been cast down, the young prince persevered against the adverse tide which fortune poured upon him, and in the end gained the partisanship of the Camerons, from which moment things had looked better; and therefore, in consideration of all these circumstances, it is no wonder that he should experience a glow of joy when he positively saw the nucleus of an army gathering around him.

CHAPTER CXCVL

PRINCE CHARLES RAISES HIS STANDARD, AND RECEIVES A STARTLING COMMUNICATION FROM TOM KING.

AGAIN and again he bowed to the assembled multitude, and, amid the acclamations of all present, the young prince gave the order for his standard to be raised and his colours unfurled.

This was done by brave old Tullibardine.

The flag was made of silk, and double the size of any that had been formerly used—the colours white, blue, and red silk.

A soldier assisted the old highland warrior to support the long, heavy staff, the sharp point of which could not be made to enter the hard, rocky soil.

The spot where the flag was raised is still pointed out. It may be seen to this day by the curious reader who may take the trouble to make a pilgrimage to Glenfinnan; for, in order that the event should never be forgotten, Macdonald of Glenaladell erected a small stone tower upon the spot, with an inscription on the base in Gaelic Latin and English commemorative of the occurrence.

Then, while the beautiful flag streamed out in the pure mountain air, Prince Charles, amid a profound silence, read a manifesto from his father James Stuart, and the commission of regency.

This over, he made a short but energetic speech to the men, which was received with loud shouts of joy, while, in the words of an eye-witness, "such loud buzzes and skimming of bonnets up into the air, appearing like a cloud, was not heard of a long time."

The hearts of all beat high with hope.

And now our four highwaymen, thinking it quite time they declared themselves, pushed forward as well as they were able, and reached at last the base of the little eminence upon which the Pretender was standing.

At the moment they thus appeared, Cameron of Lochiel, who was standing with his hand clasped by that of his prince, perceived them, and said something in a low tone to Charles Stuart, who turned round abruptly.

It was evident that at the first glance he did not recognise the highwaymen, but that was scarcely more than they had expected, for the night when their singular encounter took place was a very dark one, and he must necessarily have obtained only an imperfect view of their countenances.

Moreover, if Dick had forgotten the adventure altogether, how very likely it was that the young prince would do so.

"Excuse us, your royal highness," said Tom King, "but I have fulfilled a promise I made to you some time back. Do you remember giving me this ring?"

As he spoke, Tom held out between his fingers the bauble of which he spoke.

Lochiel took it from him, and placed it in the hands of the prince.

"Ha!" he said, as the well-remembered jewel met his gaze. "You are the two men who attacked me while disguised. I was on my way from London."

"You were, my prince, and then, if you recollect, we made a promise, which you were pleased to sanction, to the effect that, as soon as we heard you had raised your standard, we would hasten to enrol ourselves beneath it."

"You did so," said Charles Stuart, "and you are here. Believe me, you are most welcome. The incident, from its very peculiar nature, has frequently been present in my mind; but there seems to be four of you! How is that?"

"I will pardon us, my prince, for bringing with us

two of our dearest friends, who will espouse your cause with equal warmth as ourselves."

"That needs no pardon. The more who join us, the easier will it be for me to regain possession of my own, and the more bloodless will be the struggle."

"I thank your royal highness," said Tom King. "There is another matter, of the gravest importance, about which I wish to speak, but would fain find some fitting opportunity."

"Indeed!"

"The matter is important—yet not urgent."

"I will then dismiss the clans shortly, and, when that is done, do you repair to yonder cottage, where I am at present lodged, and there you shall have your say to me."

As he uttered these words, the prince gracefully held out his hand in true royal fashion.

Respectfully Tom took it in his, and, bending down over it, with his hat in his left hand, just touched it with his lips.

In this he was followed by his companions, and then all four withdrew.

The business with the soldiers lasted for some time longer yet, but at last they were all dispersed.

Ere Tom could gain his promised audience with the prince, the day was almost spent, for the sun had withdrawn his rays from the water of the lake and was sinking fast behind the mountains.

As the reader is aware, Tom's business with Charles Stuart was the restoration of the papers which had been taken from the wallet of the unfortunate messenger.

He went alone, though his courages were close at hand. Upon receiving permission to enter, Tom found himself in a small, scantily-furnished room in a cottage.

Besides the young prince himself, there were present several chieftains of note.

All looked with great curiosity at Tom King, but especially was he regarded by Lochiel.

"Your royal highness," he said, "I must request you to keep secret who and what I am, or, rather, in what character you found me."

"Willingly."

"Then, if you will have patience to hear what I have to say, I will put it into as few words as possible."

"Is it so important?" asked one of the chiefs present, and who, by his appearance, he surmised to be the Earl of Mar.

"I think it so. If you will permit me to commence, I will tell you, and then leave you to judge."

There was no reply to this speech, so Tom began—

"The intelligence, my prince, that you had landed in Scotland fell into my hands in a strange manner. A little more than a week ago, while in the midland counties of England, I was travelling the high-road to Warwick, in company with my three friends, whom you have this day seen. We had been in the saddle many hours, and our steeds were tired, so we led them into a meadow on the road-side, in order that they might have a rest.

"We, too, were tired, and glad enough to lie down on the turf beside our steeds.

"Not for long, however, had we been in this position, when, in the distance, we heard the faint sound produced by the coming of a troop of horsemen.

"Having no idea who they were, we did not attempt to move, but resolved to lie still, and allow them to pass us.

"To our surprise, however, the horsemen—there were six of them—drew up in the lane exactly before the hedge behind which we lay concealed."

"A strange coincidence," said the Young Pretender, who felt a deep and immediate interest in the narrative, which is scarcely to be wondered at, for it was well calculated to excite it, and the feeling was shared in by all the grim highland chiefs around him.

"What to make of it we knew not," continued Tom King, "and, as we were fugitives, the idea very naturally took possession of our minds that they had some special reference to us, and that they had halted where they did because they knew it to be our hiding-place.

"But we soon found this, our first surmise, to be an incorrect one, for one of the mounted men spoke—

"This place will do as well as any, I fancy," he said,

"if you are quite sure he will pass here."

"Then another one replied—

"We are quite sure of that."

"Then get behind the hedge and wait," said the one

who had first spoken, and who, for certain, was the commander of the others.

"And now I ought not to forget to mention that, riled with curiosity, we crept silently close to the hedge, and peered through it, in order to see what kind of men they were.

"Although it was night, we were well able to do this, for the moon was shining with unusual brightness, and brought to view the smallest objects.

"We saw, then, in the first place, that the strange and mysterious new-comers were in number six, and that they were each mounted on a steed of more than average quality.

"All six, we found, were dressed precisely alike, in dark-coloured vestments, and there was no distinction, in dress at least, between them. The one who had the command bore about him no distinguishing token by which he could be recognised from the others.

"When the order was given to conceal themselves behind the hedge, we looked upon our discovery as certain, but, strangely enough, they chose the one on the opposite side of the way.

"They leaped over into the meadow, and then lay perfectly still.

"What to make of all this we knew not; and while we were only ruminating upon the subject, the silence was disturbed by the faint clatter of horses' feet.

"We did not require to listen twice to know that it was a single rider who was approaching, nor that his steed was coming at a gallop.

"Clearly, you will think the men behind the hedge were lying in ambush for the one we heard coming, but we had no grounds sufficient for us to act, nor did we see how we were to interfere.

"On the horseman came, and at length he came in sight.

"For some reason or other, he reined in his steed as he reached the ambushade.

"At last he came opposite to it.

"Just as he did so, a loud voice cried, in startling tones—

"Halt!"

"The horseman who had just arrived, we saw wore a kind of military costume, and it was only natural that he should obey the order with the promptitude he did.

"He checked his steed.

"But before he could look around, and ascertain from whence or from whom the order had come, we heard a loud report, as of the discharge of several muskets, and then the horseman, uttering a loud scream of agony, fell headlong, with his steed, into the roadway.

"A cloud of thin blue vapour for a moment hid all things from our sight, but a puff of wind carried it completely away."

CHAPTER CXCVII.

OUR FRIENDS ARE APPOINTED AS BODY-GUARD TO THE YOUNG PRINCE.

WHEN Tom King reached this point in his narrative, he paused for breath, for he had spoken rapidly, and without stopping.

To his surprise, he found himself surrounded, hemmed in by a crowd of eager faces, for, as he had gone on, his auditors had, in the intensity of their interest, lessened little by little the space which intervened between them until they could positively come no closer.

However, when he paused, they drew back again, but they were still intent and listening eagerly for the next word he should utter.

Not only was there the interest the narrative itself excited, but in addition the fact pressed sternly upon them that all that they had hitherto heard was but the prelude of something that closely touched themselves.

"Proceed!" said the young prince; "let us hear the sequel of this most mysterious and horrible affair."

"I will, your royal highness. As you may easily perceive, we were at first completely overwhelmed with horror, and were unable to move; but soon another phase in the drama developed itself, which had the effect of immediately restoring to us the use of our lost faculties.

"There was a movement on the opposite side of the hedge where the assassins had concealed themselves

"Doubtless they were about to consummate their hellish purpose.

"But the sound, slight as it was, was enough to release us from the enchantment of our minds, and as if dominated by the same impulse, we all four sprang to our feet and dashed into the lane.

"Before, however, we could reach the spot where the murdered man lay, the six men had crawled through the hedge on their side.

"We met over the dead body—for both parties directed their steps to that one point, and reached it at the same moment.

"We had our swords drawn, and the hilts tightly in our grasp.

"So had they.

"Moreover, they out-numbered us; for, as I have said, they were six, we were four.

"We did not make an attack upon them, however, without first demanding an explanation of the causes that led to the commission of the foul deed we had witnessed; but, beyond saying that he was a traitor and a rebel, we could learn nothing.

"The man they had shot down was not dead; though, of course, had it not been for our intervention, they would quickly have extinguished the last spark of life remaining in his body.

"In brief, we fought the villains—for they are deserving of no better name—and worsted them.

"All but two were beaten to the ground, and these, in the most abject manner, sued for quarter, which we did not hesitate to grant to them, on condition of their throwing down their arms, and telling us all they knew of the affair.

"It was from the lips of these men that I first learned, my prince, that you had landed on the northern shores of Scotland, and were about to raise an army and invade England.

"In addition to this they told us that information had been given by a spy, that a messenger from you to the chief Jacobites in London would pass that way, and that he would carry with him papers of vast importance.

"To our inquiries whether that was the reason why they had been sent out upon such a brutal errand, they answered in the affirmative. And the sole reason they could give for the sanguinary deed was, that it was expected to find upon his person a list of names which would enable them to arrest the principal adherents of the house of Stuart then residing in London or its vicinity."

A loud, angry, guttural shout came from the throats of the highland chieftains and Prince Charles as they were made the recipients of this news, and their pale, stern faces, showed how deeply they felt the danger in which their cause and lives had been.

But the deep desire they felt to hear the remnant—for they could tell Tom King's narrative was now rapidly approaching a termination—made them curb as much as possible all outward manifestation of their feelings.

Amid a partial silence he continued—

"These two men, whom we found afterwards were soldiers, we suffered to escape; and then, having done so, we turned our attention to the wounded messenger.

"The moon still shone brightly, and showed us his figure very distinctly.

"The horse was quite dead.

"But his rider lived.

"Assuring him that we were friends, he with his latest breath confirmed what the men had told us, and, having given a cheer for Prince Charlie, he expired."

The eyes of the bold highlanders glistened, and the angry expression of their faces was softened somewhat when they thought of the loyalty of their countryman.

"And now," said Tom, "I shall be obliged to speak of myself. Believe me, my prince, that I am sincerely devoted to your cause; and so I resolved that, come what might, papers of so dangerous a character to you as I supposed those were carried by the messenger, should never fall into your enemies' hands; and so, loathsome as the task was, I stooped down to search the pockets of the murdered man.

"The result of that search, my prince, is here. I tender you the papers in the same condition as I found them in the wallet of the messenger. They have been in

my possession ever since, and during that time they have been touched and read by no one."

With these words, Tom King took from his pocket the packets of papers, and bending upon one knee, presented them to his prince.

Blood was upon them in many places.

And now the highlanders, but for the respect they felt for young Charles Stuart, would have crowded around our friend with every manifestation of friendship; but as it was, they held back.

The prince rose from the rude chair in the cottage, upon which he had been sitting, at the same time extending his hand to Tom King, and assisting him to rise likewise.

Then he placed his right hand upon the shoulder of the highwayman and spoke.

The tones of his voice were deep and fervent.

"For the great service you have rendered me," he said, "I shall never be able to show myself sufficiently grateful. I am poor in thanks, and never had the gift of eloquently expressing myself in words. But, if I cannot speak, I can act, and you will find that I shall do so on the present occasion in a manner that will please and satisfy all; for, had these papers been taken possession of by our foes, we should have been irredeemably ruined."

Tom bowed.

There was a pleased feeling at his heart.

He had done a service, and it had been appreciated.

Still he did not wish the young chivalric prince to bestow the meed of honour upon him only, and, therefore, he took the earliest opportunity to state that his three friends had been animated by precisely the same feelings as he had, and desired that they might meet with a reward equal to his own.

This speech still further increased the admiration which the highlanders felt for our friend, for, let them have been as rude and unpolished as they may, they yet were able to properly appreciate magnanimity and courage—two qualities that must of necessity ever go together.

"Call them hither," said the prince.

This was done.

Our three friends, who had been outside during the whole of this scene, received the summons to enter with some surprise.

"It fills my heart with joy," said Prince Charles, as he gazed upon the forms of the four highwaymen, "and I am sure it must all those friends who are here present, to gaze upon such staunch friends to our cause, and such brave men. But," he added, turning to Tom King, "it is to you that I feel myself most specially indebted, and so I say to you, name your own reward for what you have done."

"I am more than repaid," replied Tom, "by possessing the kind opinion of your royal highness."

This speech pleased and flattered the Pretender.

It seemed as though he already held the sceptre in his grasp.

"But," he added, "there must be something you can wish for. Let me know what it is, you wish to please me. If in my power, your request shall be granted."

"We have no other wish than to serve your royal highness," replied Tom King. "Will you permit us to join your ranks?"

"We have already done so," replied Charles, "but I will name something. I admire you. You are all four truly brave men, and I should like you to form a species of body-guard about my person. Will you do this?"

"Willingly, my prince! I am glad you made the proposal, for it is one I should never have presumed to ask myself. You will indeed confer a high honour upon us, and reward our services more richly than they deserve."

"Not so—not so!" replied the prince. "What is your opinion, my friends?" he continued, turning to the chiefs, who were around him. "Can I place too high a value upon the service which these men have collectively and individually rendered us?"

"No—no!" they cried, with one accord. "Hurrah! for the brave Southrons!"

As soon as the tumult had a little subsided, Lochiel stepped forward.

He looked upon our friends.

"Do you accept," he asked, "the post which your prince offers you? Are you content with that as a reward for all that you have done?"

"We are more than satisfied! We will defend him to

the last gasp, and he need fear nothing from his enemies while we are round him."

Little by little the story of the assassinated messenger was diffused among the troops; and so, ere long, the four highwaymen found themselves treated wherever they went with the greatest consideration and respect.

Better days we hope are in store for them than any they have yet seen, but at present we have only the hope to rely upon.

We must, with what patience we can, continue to watch the progress of events as we have hitherto done.

CHAPTER CXCVIII.

THE YOUNG PRETENDER SUFFERS HIMSELF TO BE DELUDED BY HIS TRANSIENT TRIUMPHS.

EVERY hour which now elapsed only served to show fresh men flocking to the standard of the Pretender, whose troops now began to assume the appearance of a regular army.

But all these proceedings had not taken place without attracting a great deal of notice to them, and the result was that Sir John Cope, the commander-in-chief of the forces in the south of Scotland, received instructions to raise what force he could, and march against the rebels.

Intelligence of this soon reached the Pretender's camp, who, under the advice of his chiefs, set his troops in motion, and began his march southward, their avowed object being to take possession of the palace of St. James's, in London.

By the intimate knowledge of the mountain passes which some of the highlanders possessed, they were able, without much trouble, to elude the force under Sir John Cope.

The two armies passed each other in Argyleshire, and the young prince proceeded to Perth.

Of this place they took possession, without the least resistance being offered them; in fact, they were much strengthened, for they were joined by the Duke of Perth, Lord Murray, Lord Nairn, and many others of less note, yet all powerful men.

Flushed with their success, and auguring from it the most favourable conclusions, the rebel army left Perth behind them, and pushed forward rapidly, the point to which they were directing their steps being the city of Edinburgh.

This they reached in three days.

They found the ancient city in a very defenceless state, and, as their numbers were now very formidable, they took possession of it with very little trouble.

Here they supplied themselves with arms and ammunition, and on the following day marched out to attack the royal army under the command of General Cope.

The two opposing forces came in sight of each other at a place which will be ever memorable in English history.

This was Preston Pans.

Early in the morning the Pretender's troops made a furious attack upon their foes, and threw them into unspeakable confusion.

The conflict was a desperate one, but at length the Young Pretender gained a complete victory over his foes, and compelled them to fly before him like chaff before the wind.

Still more elated, they marched back to Edinburgh, and the next morning attacked the castle, which had been put in the best possible posture for defence by the governor.

But it would seem that the rebels were destined to carry all before them.

They were now, at least, twelve thousand strong.

Leaving Edinburgh, and indulging in the wildest hopes of ultimate success, they determined to penetrate into England.

In accordance with this determination, they proceeded to Carlisle, and, much to the surprise of the inhabitants of that city, they were discovered one morning as the fog cleared off surrounding the walls.

This unexpected sight filled them with a panic from which they never recovered. The most exaggerated accounts had reached them of the power of the rebels, and they felt that their last hour was come.

But, when the attack was made upon this city, great difficulty was experienced in carrying it for a desperate

resistance was made at the eleventh hour. It, however, availed nothing. The young prince was again a victor.

It can easily be understood how rapidly people would flock to his standard under such circumstances as these; and, indeed, the manner in which their numbers increased was really astounding.

The French, too, now that they saw some prospect of the Pretender carrying out his original intention, hastened to send arms, ammunition, and money to his assistance, all of which were very thankfully received.

But during this time the English Government was not idle, and the king thought fit to send his son, the Duke of Cumberland, at the head of eight battalions, and nine squadrons just returned from service abroad, to march against them.

But, in the meanwhile, the young prince, by the counsel of his officers, lost no time in following up the advantages he had gained, and he continued his course for some time longer into the very heart of England.

It will be noticed that we have not entered into the details of this episode in the lives of the highwaymen. There is so little always to vary the monotony of a soldier's life, almost constantly on duty, that particulars would but be destructive to interest.

In consequence of the favour with which they were looked on by the prince and the whole body of the soldiery, they fared much better than many of the others did. From this circumstance, however, it must not be inferred that they had no privations to endure, but then they were tolerably inured to hardships of all kinds.

As, however, the rebel army got farther into England, so did their dangers and difficulties increase. They no longer met with the easy victories which they had done hitherto. Every point had to be contended with the sword's point.

And now, to add to the young chief's troubles, disaffection arose among the troops. The highland chiefs, as they got nearer to the object, got more and more frightened at its magnitude, and would willingly have withdrawn.

England was to them a *terra incognita*, and they advanced with much the same feelings as the ancients when first prosecuting their discoveries.

It was in vain the prince exhorted them not to leave him and abandon his enterprise when so close upon achievement. They grew more obstinate, and at last refused to proceed altogether.

This was a dilemma which the prince was very far from anticipating.

There was, of course, much danger in advancing, but, perhaps, not any more than there would be in retreating. Either way they would have to cut their way through an army, for they were menaced both in front and rear.

To remain undecided, moving neither one way or the other, would be utter ruin, for it would give time for the two armies to coalesce, and then, hemmed in completely, what could they hope to do?

At last they began that disastrous retreat, so well remembered by the student of English history, and which, while it crushed the present rising, effectually put an end to all hopes of the Stuarts regaining possession of the throne.

It was with heavy and reluctant hearts that our friends turned their backs upon their undertaking. Such a course was entirely foreign to their nature. Rather than have retreated, they would have walked boldly and fearlessly to certain death.

But, under existing circumstances, what could they do? The more they saw of the young prince, the more they liked him, and the more deeply they sympathised with his unfortunate situation. With that chivalric feeling, which formed so important an element in their dispositions, they resolved to stand by him to the last.

The post of body-guard, to which they had been appointed, they maintained throughout the whole of the campaign.

Between the young Pretender and Tom King were arose a warm feeling of friendship. At his earnest solicitations, the highwayman had acquainted him with the melancholy details of his history.

Their ages, too, were similar; and so this friendship, strange as it may at first sight seem, was not much to be wondered at.

Heenly did all four reel for the distress of the Pre-ender

when his army, of which he had had such great expectations, fairly turned their backs upon London, and began their retreat.

Sanguine and enthusiastic as he was, he had continued to hope on, and had never allowed himself to be cast down by any adverse circumstance. Now, however, it was impossible for him to hope any longer; the bright vision which he had had before him from the earliest moment of his existence faded away.

From town to town, from city to city, they went, enduring greater hardships than could be conceived, and those of the populace who had been favourable to them, when there was a chance of their gaining their ends, now turned against them with the utmost fury.

The consequence of this was, that all order was lost. The troops no longer marched in companies, but diffused themselves in every direction, committing excesses of all kinds.

It may be imagined with what different feelings the young prince re-entered the towns of which he had taken possession during his advance. Then his heart was elate with joy. He saw in the distance the great project of his life achieved. Now all was at an end.

No matter what may be the prejudices or new sympathies of any one, it is impossible not to feel a deep interest and pity for the fate of this young man.

Like his father before him, he had only been made the tool of others, who desired to gain their own ends, not his.

At length the borders of Scotland were reached, and the soldiers, now that they found their feet upon their native soil, felt ashamed of their fears, and expressed a return of that bravery and courage for which they have always been celebrated.

They resolved even yet not to abandon the Pretender's cause, but make a bold and vigorous stand.

But it was too late.

Awful words!

They seem like a death knell.

Too late!

The resolution was one that should have been made long ago.

The government had had time to take such measures as would effectually crush the insurrection, even though it was thrice as great and thrice as powerful as it then was.

The king's troops, under the command of the Duke of Cumberland, were hard upon their track.

Sanguine to the last, the Pretender hoped that this most desperate chance would enable him to retrieve his shattered fortunes.

CHAPTER CXCIX.

WHICH RELATES HOW THE REBEL ARMY AND THE KING'S TROOPS FOUGHT A PITCHED BATTLE UPON CULLODEN MOOR.

Not to weary the reader too much with historic details, we will pass over all the minor incidents which occurred, and present to him a scene full of grandeur, magnificence, and horror.

It is the night before the battle of Culloden—that struggle upon which depended everything.

The two armies had halted at some distance from each other; but both, having decided on a pitched battle, determined to abide the issue of the day.

In the rebel camp—for such we must perforce denominate it—all is bustle and excitement, despite the fatigue from which all suffered.

The young prince was much agitated, nor could all the assurances of his friends tend in any way to calm him.

He felt with all intensity the importance of the coming struggle.

But there was a little tent pitched not far from the one appropriated to the use of the Pretender, and, from among all the others dotted over the plain, we select that one for our especial consideration.

The weather was bitter cold, but in this tent there blazed, in a kind of iron-basket in the centre, a good fire, round which were seated four familiar faces.

Does the reader require to be told who they are?

The fatigue and harassment of the campaign had left its traces upon them.

They were pale and thin, with their features sharp and sunken.

And Tom King looked sombre.

He all through had felt, and still continued to feel, as deep an interest in the whole struggle as though he had been the prince himself, and though he felt ill at ease about the morrow yet his enthusiasm would not allow him to show it.

He was elate.

"Do not look so moody, my friends," he said. "From to-morrow all will be changed, for I have still the greatest confidence in the highland broadsword. There is not a man who is not fully conscious that all will depend upon this day's issue."

"That may be," said Claude Duval; "and I sincerely trust that so it may turn out, but I fear it will not."

"And I," said Sixteen-String Jack; "in fact, I look upon the Pretender's cause as perfectly hopeless."

"But you will not desert it on that account?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"Certainly not. Having gone so far, I will see the end."

"And you, Dick?"

"Of course, I shall remain with you. I hope we shall all cling together! To-morrow will be a sharp contest. Hitherto, you must remember, we have been fortunate enough to escape without a wound. Whether we shall do so or not to-morrow is another matter."

"Do not anticipate evil, Dick," said King. "You seem very gloomy to-night; to be sure, there is cause for gloominess."

"It may be, Tom, that this is destined to be the last time we shall all four sit together. I do feel very heavy at my heart, but that is a thing no one can help."

"For one," said Duval, "I always cling to the belief that there sometimes comes such things as presentiments of danger."

"Talk upon some other subject," said Tom King. "The more you dwell upon such imaginary evils, the more terrible they become."

"True—true! But let me ask you to speak candidly, and say what chance you think there is of any good coming of this rash undertaking."

"Things do not look very promising just now, to be sure," replied King; "but yet I do not despair."

"Nor I, exactly; but from one of the spies I learned the British army is much superior to ours in point of numbers and weapons; and not only that, the men are all thoroughly rested."

"Which cannot be said of ours," chimed in Sixteen-String Jack. "Such a miserable lot of half-starved wretches I never remember to have seen."

"But they have true courage and are strong, and so the king's troops will find them to-morrow."

"You will, perhaps, think it foolish," said Dick Turpin, "but I cannot divest myself of the idea that fate has all along been unpropitious to this enterprise. There has been nothing gained as yet, and I do not believe there ever will. Too much valuable time was wasted at the first—time which they should have employed in active operations against the enemy. Time lost can never be regained. It afforded the government the opportunity of concerting the most summary proceedings against us. Tom, my friend, rely upon it, we have lost the day. The young prince, Charles Edward Stuart, will retire into that obscurity from which he has emerged, and never be heard of more."

Tom King shook his head.

"I am of that opinion," said Duval.

"And so am I," coincided Jack.

"You are all against me, then?" said Tom; and as he asked the question, there was just the least tinge of vexation perceptible in the tone of his voice.

"We are."

"I am sorry to hear you say as much," he replied, "very sorry."

"But in a few hours we shall know the worst."

"Or the best."

"Yes, or the best; but I should say the former would be most likely as regards ourselves."

"I cannot help your being of such an opinion; but, my friends, for the sake of all of us, and for the sake of the young prince, who has acted so well to us, do not go out

to-morrow to the conflict with such thoughts as, those upon your minds."

"How can it be helped?"

"That I leave to yourselves; but you cannot do other wise than agree with me in saying that were such a feeling general throughout the army, defeat would be inevitable."

"So it would."

"Confidence in a cause or undertaking goes a long way towards insuring its success."

"I know that," said Turpin, "and will try my best to look on the bright side of things. You ought to know that I am not one given to despondence."

"That is true, I admit."

"Look I ere, Tom, I will promise you this, and I should not be afraid to say that Claude and Jack will promise you the same thing."

"Why is it?"

"Why, that to-morrow—or, rather, to-day, for it is now long past midnight—in the struggle we will, as much for your sake as anything, cast our own feelings and prejudices on one side, and use our best individual exertions in the coming fray. Do you promise, Jack?"

"Willingly."

"And you, Claude?"

"Most certainly."

"I am glad to hear as much," said Tom King; "do not forget, I pray, how much depends upon the issue of to-morrow's conflict. It will either make or ruin us."

"No, no," said Turpin, "I will not say that."

"Why not?"

"Because it would not be true."

"But I maintain it would."

"How can that be?"

"Explain yourself."

"With all my heart. I grant, in the first place, that if the Young Pretender—"

"He is no pretender."

"Well, then, the young prince. I say I am willing to grant that if he gains the day our position may be much bettered; but I do not see that it follows we should be any worse off if he loses than we were before we joined ourselves to his fortunes."

"I don't say we should; but what I meant was, there would be no hope of quitting our late mode of life upon the road."

"Nor, to tell the truth," said Dick Turpin, "do I particularly wish to do so. Next to it, the life of a soldier must be most adventurous and exciting, but I am sure I shall never prefer it."

"And shall you never tire of the highway?"

"Who knows? I fear there is not much chance of our doing anything else. Our lives are now doubly forfeit, and to hope for pardon or mercy would be mere folly. As we have been so must we be."

"Let us defer the consideration of that until after the battle. But there is one point in connexion with it which we have not hitherto touched upon, but yet which I should like you to attentively consider."

"What is it, Tom? Speak out."

"I will. Let us suppose the battle over, the king's troops victorious, and the young prince defeated."

"That is a very rational and probable supposition, indeed," broke in Claude Duval.

"It may be."

"But go on."

"Will you listen to me?"

"Certainly we will."

"Well, then," resumed Tom, who was not altogether pleased with his companions' manner, "supposing that things should eventuate in the manner I have spoken of, the young prince's position, assuming that he should escape death or capture, will be a most dangerous one, will it not?"

"It will, indeed."

"But what should you do under the circumstances?"

"In what way?"

"I mean should you depart in the best way you are able, or should you consider it your duty to stick by Prince Charlie to the last?"

"I don't know for the last."

"I mean until we have seen him disposed in some place of safety. Whether you do or not, I consider that you are in duty bound to do so. He appointed us, as a token

of his esteem, to be his body guard, and that, too, at a time when things looked promising; and no amount of reasoning will make me think it less than an act of baseness to desert him in the hour of difficulty and danger."

"You are chivalric, Tom, to a degree."

"No matter, I feel that I am right."

"And so do we. Until you mentioned it, we never gave the matter the least thought; but rest assured, let the fortune of war be what it will, we, like you, will hold by him until we see him in safety—seated either on the British throne, or landed on some shore where he will be out of the reach of his foes."

"We are, then, it seems, quite agreed upon this point. I am glad of it. But morning cannot be far distant; let us, ere it comes, obtain what sleep and rest we can, for who knows how long it may be before we have another opportunity?"

CHAPTER CC.

DICK TURPIN SAVES THE LIFE OF CHARLES STUART, THE YOUNG PRETENDER, AT THE BATTLE OF CULLODEN.

MISTILY, gloomily, coldly, and cheerlessly dawned the morning which preceded the dread battle of Culloden.

So dark was it that neither army was astir until a much later hour than they had intended.

The heavens were covered with one huge black cloud, which, like a funeral pall, hid the face of the god of day, whose beams should otherwise, for an hour before, have revived the earth.

Prince Charles, when he perceived the aspect of the weather, and noted the absence of the sun, drew an unfavourable augury from both events, and allowed his spirits to become proportionally depressed.

Unlike the savage and ruthless Duke of Glo'ster, he was not endued with that philosophic force which Shakspeare has, in common with many of his other characters, assigned to him; and so the young prince could not chase away the ominous effect it had upon him by thinking, as he did, upon a similar occurrence in the well-remembered scene before the battle of Bosworth Field, where he asks who has seen the sun, and is replied to, that he has not yet been forth:—

Then he disdains to shine—for by the clock,
He should have braved the east an hour ago;
Not shine to-day! Why, what is that to me,
More than to Richmond? for the self-same heaven
That frowns on me, looks lowering upon him!

But, as we have said, the young prince could not draw consolation from such a source; and though those around him endeavoured to rally him, the attempt was unsuccessful.

It was nearly eleven o'clock in the forenoon before the opposing forces fairly came in contact with each other; but, from that moment, a struggle commenced of so sanguinary a character as had never before been known.

The highlanders, although some discontent had arisen respecting the position the several clans occupied, behaved with great valour and intrepidity.

To add to their difficulties, a fine, sharp, sleety rain, of that kind so common in Scotland, began to fall. It was carried by a high wind into their faces, which, accustomed as they were to inclement weather, baffled and confused them.

As for the royalists, they felt comparatively little or no inconvenience from it, for they had the wind and rain to their backs instead of to their faces.

It has been general on the part of those antagonistic to the Stuart cause to describe the young scion, Charles Edward, as a young man destitute of personal courage, and especially is the statesman Horace Walpole noticeable for this, but there are two sides to all questions, and it is hardly likely that we should be correctly portrayed by our enemies.

The fact was, a Prince Charles had found it necessary and advisable to adopt the costume of his own men in order that he might not be recognizable from the mass except by those who knew him. As must be well known to all, the government had offered a reward of £30,000 to any one who should take him prisoner either dead or alive, and we shall see presently how this circumstance actually turned out favourable to the prince, instead of adverse, as any one would think.

The four highwaymen, with him in their centre, could

be seen in the very thickest of the fray, urging the men to make still greater efforts, and using every possible argument they could to induce them to do so.

Very soon, however, was the disagreeable conviction forced upon those best qualified to form an opinion that the hope of the Stuarts gaining a victory was but slight indeed. The highlanders, bold as they were, could not make any impression on the English bayonet—the most formidable of all weapons in the hands of a determined infantry.

Onwards—imperceptibly at first, but yet there was a movement—came the British troops, and, as a matter of course, as they pressed forward, so did the highlanders retreat.

But the advantage gained by the king's troops was only temporary. The moor in many places was little better than a treacherous bog or morass, and, fearful lest the soft, oozy mud should engulf them, they held back.

This moment was seized upon by the prince's troops to make a furious charge upon their foes, nor was the opportunity ill-chosen.

Prince Charles himself, mounted upon a powerful war-horse, and surrounded by his body-guard, the four highwaymen, led the way; and this was an act which excited the utmost enthusiasm of his men, and made them second his efforts with unparalleled intrepidity.

The royalist troops wavered.

One of the first to note this was the prince.

Joy, and triumph, and hope beamed in his eye; and, holding his claymore aloft, he cried aloud to his followers in their native tongue.

They dashed impetuously onwards.

But the royalists had received a reinforcement, and came to a stand.

The infantry sank down, and presented a triple row of bristling steel bayonets, which looked as solid as a wall.

And here, it should be stated, that the Duke of Cumberland, brother to King George the Second, and commander of the troops, found a new mode of using the bayonet, which was put into execution with terrible effect.

It may be briefly described in a few words.

The usual plan was for the bayonet-man to attack the swordsman facing him; but, instead of this, the left-hand bayonet-man attacked the swordsman fronting his right-hand man. From this it will be seen that he was covered by his adversary's target, where he was open on his left, and his adversary's right was open to him.

This change produced an inconceivable difference.

Puzzled at this fresh mode of fighting, the highlanders staggered.

Following up their advantage the bayonet-men pressed more closely upon them, until they forced them to retreat.

It was in vain that the young prince and the gallant hearts he had around him strove to once more rally their almost defeated troops. They were deaf to all commands, all entreaties, and all threats; and, at last, fairly turned and fled.

Prince Charles made a bold stand to the last, resolved that no effort of his own should be wanting to insure the victory; but, while in the very act of beating back an enemy, his claymore, which had hitherto served him so well, snapped off suddenly, about six inches from the hilt, leaving him, for a moment, utterly defenceless.

His foes pressed closely upon him, and one would assuredly have taken his life had not Dick Turpin, with the greatest promptitude, sprung forward, aimed a pistol, hastily, drew the trigger, and fired.

The reader knows already that it was very rarely indeed Dick missed his mark; and this time he assuredly did not, for the soldier, with an awful death-shriek, fell backwards on the battle-field.

"Alight, my prince!" cried Turpin, hurriedly. "Down! down! it is our only chance! They are upon us!"

Seizing the Young Pretender by the arm, he half-dragged, half-assisted him from his horse.

Then followed a volley of musketry, which, if he had been in the saddle, would assuredly have added the prince with bullets.

As it was, he was safe, or comparatively so, but the king's troops at that moment made a sudden charge.

Both turned to fly.

The prince had hold of the highwayman by the wrist



[THE BANDITTI IN THE CAVERN AFFORD THE FUGITIVE PRINCE PROTECTION.]

But one or both of them, in their blind haste, caught their feet against some obstacle, and were thrown heavily to the ground.

Ere they could regain their feet, something fell with terrific force upon them.

The next moment the right wing of the royal army rushed over them at full speed.

Tom King, Sixteen-String Jack, and Claude Duval had, in the rapid encounter, got in some way separated from them.

They were on foot, and armed to the teeth, and well, indeed, was it for their safety that they were, for the tide of battle that drifted them from the side of the prince carried them into the very thickest of the fight, where they had to use every exertion to defend themselves.

As it was, Claude Duval was struck down by a bullet, and as his companions feared, killed, and though they would fain have ascertained the extent of his injuries, and, if possible, have got him on his feet, yet they were unable to do so without running the risk of being thrown down

and trampled to death, so impetuous was this last and decisive charge of the king's troops.

Like the rest, therefore, they scattered before it, and finding that there was no hope of gaining the day, and that their lives depended upon their speedy flight, they managed to escape with only one or two trifling hurts.

But when, after for an hour or so fleeing from their foes, they sunk exhausted on the ground, they began to entertain the most serious misgivings for their companion's fate, and for the young prince's also.

But the only chance they had of safety was to remain where they were for some time, at least.

So soon, however, as it was prudent for them to do so, they determined to rise and seek them.

The hearts of both were heavy, and, not only that, they were filled with disappointment; Tom King especially so, for he had, up to the last, hugged the belief that the Pretender's army would prove the victors.

Now, however, he saw that hope entirely lost. The downfall of the Stuarts was complete, and from such a

defeat as that which they met at the fatal battle on Culloden Moor, he felt certain they would never recover.

But we shall see what next took place in this crisis in our friends' affairs.

CHAPTER CCL.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEARCH THE BATTLE-FIELD BY TORCHLIGHT FOR THEIR MISSING COMRADES.

It is the night after the battle of Culloden.

The strife of battle is over.

Heaps of dead and dying strew the plain.

From the latter there comes incessantly a terrible groaning sound. At times it is louder than others, as some chill blast of air sweeps over the bleak moor, augmenting the sufferings of those who lie there helpless to move.

The aggregation of sound which rose from the hundreds of parched and burning throats was truly horrible. It was the representative of a world of agony.

An almost full moon showed her face now and then as gaps in the clouds occurred, revealing upon such occasions with greater distinctness the melancholy spectacle.

Different portions of the plain are also brought into vivid relief by pine-wood torches, borne by those who have come to search for some friend or relative among the ghastly mass.

Other figures, too, could have been seen creeping stealthily about. They were the plunderers of the slain.

How much additional pain these wretched carrion caused, no tongue can tell.

Very few upon the battle field who wore the Highland dress were left alive. They had not fallen until they had not breath and strength enough left to stand.

The Duke of Cumberland, with the natural ferocity of his disposition, had given his men the order, in a significant tone, "to take no prisoners."

All knew what was meant, and the savage order was ruthlessly carried out.

Among those who bore torches and searched among the dying and the dead, seeking for a familiar face, were two old friends of the readers.

Each carried a blazing torch in his left hand, and a sword in his right.

The features of both, as they were occasionally seen with more than usual plainness, bore upon them the impress of fatigue and disappointment.

"This is weary work, Tom," said one, after they had one by one displaced a large heap of slain. "Very weary work."

"It is, indeed, Jack," replied the other; "but I hope it will not be fruitless."

"And so do I, indeed. We have met with no success as yet, and we have travelled over no inconsiderable portion of the field."

"We have. None but those who have experienced it can tell what it is to search a place like this. I had no idea how vast it was."

"Nor I, Jack. But do not let us despair."

"No—no."

"I knew you would not."

"I will not."

"It is very strange that we should lose both of them—or, as I might say, all three."

"You think, then, the young prince is on the field."

"I do. I feel almost sure of it, indeed, and for that reason I have done my best to spread a report that he had retreated to Inverness."

"And so, by sending his foes upon a wrong track, give him a better chance of escape."

"Just so, but I tremble for him if he is here wounded anywhere. There are many who know him who would not scruple to deprive him of his life, for, as you know, the reward of £30,000 will be paid to any one who will carry his head to London."

"The Hanoverians are bloodthirsty butchers."

"Right. They do not want him a prisoner. They are far too merciless. They want him dead, for, while he lives, they just exist in terror."

"Let us hope he will escape from the power of his foes. Poor young man, his lot is a sad one."

"I cannot help pitying him myself, Tom."

"Nor can any one with the least spark of rath within

their bosoms. He has his faults and failings, but ~~they~~ he has had enough to try his temper."

"So he has."

"Just help me, Jack, a moment," said Tom King. "There seems to be some one lying under this great horse. I don't know whether we shall manage it, but let us try to move him. It may be one of those we seek lies underneath him."

"I hope not, for if there is I would not give much for his life! It would be stifled out of them."

"I am afraid it would, but Jack, my friend, you must not, because we have escaped without scarcely a scratch, expect that the others have been equally fortunate. If we find them at all, we shall find them badly wounded, perhaps dead."

"I hope not," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I shall be good for nothing if Claude should be no more."

"It is strange where he could have gone. He was by our side when we were overtaken by that rush and cast down, and I thought he was cast down with us."

"But it seems he was not."

"It does; but you must not forget that, though we made a search for him around the spot where we ourselves rose, it was necessarily an imperfect one, and since that time we have not been able to say with certainty this is the place."

"All that is very true, and I don't dispute a word of it. The plain bears always the same appearance by this light, let you go where you will."

"I am of opinion that we have not reached the spot again where we fell, though, of course, I could not speak positively."

"It may be, Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that Claude has been made a prisoner."

"Very likely he has, and yet I don't know, the order given to the soldiery by the butcher, Cumberland, was to make no prisoners."

"And that is equivalent to no quarter."

"The same thing in other words; but come, my friend, help me to move this horse. We shall be doing some one a good service, for I can hear there is some person beneath who is alive."

"All right; but it will take our whole united strength to move the animal."

"I know it will."

"And we have only got one hand at liberty. What are we to do with the torches?"

"I don't know, hardly."

"Nor I."

"The ground is soft."

"A good thought. We shall, I daresay, be able to stick them upright in the damp soil. Try."

"I will."

After several unsuccessful efforts, the two highwaymen succeeded in sticking their torches perpendicularly in the ground, where they burned almost as well as they did while they held them in their hands.

This done, they turned the whole of their attention to moving the horse to which they had alluded, and which seemed to be lying upon two or three people.

He was unusually large and powerful.

To various portions of his body there clung pieces of harness, the character of which seemed to show that this horse had been used to drag a cannon about the field.

He was quite dead, and his whole body was rigid as marble.

How he came there of course they knew not, but from what they could see, it would appear that he had broken from the gun-carriage, and had either been shot down where he then was, or had fallen there exhausted.

But whichever of these it might be, assuredly did not much matter.

With right goodwill they set about the removal of the gigantic beast, and in doing so they were careful not to inflict any additional injury upon those beneath it.

The task was one almost beyond their strength to accomplish, but at length they succeeded.

The moment afterwards a voice, well known to both, said—

"Many thanks, you have saved my life. I know you, or I am mistaken."

"The prince!" cried Tom King.

"Yes, help me to my feet."

"But are you wounded?"

"I think not. I am bruised by that horse falling upon me, but that is all, and I fancy nothing more ails your companion."

"Companion, my prince! Which one?"

"Turpin."

"Ha!"

"He was with me in the strife, and by great promptitude shot a soldier through the heart, who would otherwise most certainly have slain me."

"And he saved you?"

"He did," said the prince, who, having risen, was able to stand by supporting himself with his sword. "He dragged me from my horse, and bade me fly. He clutched me tightly by the arm, and pulled me so I was forced to obey him; but the enemy charged, and in our hasty flight we stumbled, and something fell upon us seemingly a ton weight, and after that I remember nothing until this moment."

"I rejoice, my prince, that you are no worse hurt. I have sent your foes upon a false track, by spreading a report that you had fled to Inverness, which will make it all the easier for you to quit the field."

"I shall never know the extent of my obligation to you," said Charles Stuart; "but before we talk upon such subjects as those, we ought to see to the state of your companion."

"Dick Turpin!"

"Yes; you will find him on the ground, somewhere close to the spot where I myself laid."

"Is he killed, my prince?"

"No, I think not. I do not expect to find him any worse hurt than I am."

"That is good news," said Jack. "We were almost beginning to despair of finding him, for we have searched the field very many hours."

"Another of our companions is also missing, my prince," said Tom King, "and that is Claude Duval. During the last impetuous charge made by the king's troops we got in some manner separated, nor have we been able since to find anything of him."

"Indeed, you have been unfortunate, and yet things might have been much worse; but why do you not attend your comrade, who, I say, fell down with me?"

"Pardon us, prince. With your permission we will do so now."

"And I will sit down upon the carcase of the horse the while, for standing tires me."

As he spoke, the young Prince Charles, who was in a sadly exhausted condition, sat down upon the haunches of the war-horse, while the two highwaymen again taking their torches in their hands, commenced an examination of the dead bodies that had been buried under the noble animal.

CHAPTER CCII.

OUR FRIENDS, AFTER MUCH DIFFICULTY, FIND THE BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL UPON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

SUDDENLY a cry broke from Tom King's lips, which was immediately echoed by one from those of Sixteen-String Jack.

They had recognised Turpin.

He was lying quite motionless, in a strange huddled-up attitude.

Instantly replacing their torches in the earth, they stooped down and straightened his limbs.

Dick groaned slightly as this was done, but he did not in any other way manifest his consciousness.

Still the sound was welcome to his two comrades, for it was enough to show them that life still held possession.

His body was very cold, but that was scarcely to be wondered at, considering the inclemency of the season, and the length of time he had been lying upon the ground.

Before departing upon their melancholy expedition, Tom King had taken care to provide himself with a bottle containing some kind of pungent essence, so taking the little glass stopper out he next, he held it to his friend's nostrils.

One inhalation was enough.

Uttering a long-drawn sigh, Turpin opened his eyes.

He looked for a minute or two confusedly about him, and then he remembered what had taken place.

He raised himself to a sitting posture, and then, by the aid of Jack's arm, gained his feet.

But he had almost taxed his strength too far.

Every object which he saw appeared to be spinning round him in mad gyrations.

By closing his eyes, however, he put an end to that.

"How are you, Dick?" asked his companions, anxiously.

"Better!"

"That is well."

"My brain swims, but I am getting the better of that now."

"It will soon cease," said Jack.

"Are you wounded?" asked Tom King. "I have looked, but did not discover any traces of one."

"No, I am not wounded—at least, I think not. It was that confounded horse that did it. He threw us down, and then fell with his whole weight on the top of us. I lay a long while perfectly aware of what was going on, but after a time I lost all consciousness."

"I think it was fortunate we found you when we did. You were doubled up in a very awkward way, and it is quite a mystery to me how you managed to draw your breath."

"It was that that finished me, my friend. You see I got into that position by my own exertions, in trying to get free from the mass above me, but I could not manage it."

"Well, well; let us be thankful you are no worse."

"Where is the prince?" cried Dick. "Have you found him? He fell down, and lay beside me, for he was buried by the horse."

"I am here," said the Young Pretender, as he stepped forward a few paces, for he had been standing on one side in order to allow the friends to speak to each other without restraint.

"And unhurt?" said Turpin.

"Quite, with the exception of some such bruises as you yourself may have received, but they are nothing."

"That is good news. Tom, my friend?"

"Yes, Dick."

"I feel rather faint."

"I suppose you do."

"Have you got such a thing about you as a drop of brandy?"

"To be sure, why didn't I think of it before. Forgive me, my friend."

"Oh! don't mention it."

"At least, it is not brandy, but it is something quite as good. I could not get brandy for love or money."

"What is it, then?" asked Dick, as he took from his comrade's hand a tolerable-sized bottle, and carried it to his lips.

"Rum."

"Better still," replied Turpin. Then, before he tasted the spirit, he turned and handed it to the prince.

"Drink," he said; "I am sure you must require some stimulant. Drink deeply, for we shall have great fatigue, doubtless, to undergo."

Thus adjured, the Young Pretender took the bottle, and drank a portion of its contents.

He then returned it to Turpin, who let it trickle down his throat at an alarming rate.

"Stop! stop!" said Tom and Jack. "Stop! stop! Don't drink it all, Dick. We shall want some left for Claude Duval."

"Claude Duval. Where is he? Not here?"

It was the first time Dick had noticed that one familiar face and form was absent.

"No," replied Tom King, "Claude is not here."

"Is he dead?"

"No. At least I hope not. We were all three thrown down and trampled upon by a sudden charge made by the enemy's troops."

"Like the prince and myself."

"Just so; but when we rose, although we searched in every direction for Claude, we could not find him."

"Has he been taken prisoner?"

"I trust not; but that is more than I can tell. I fancy we shall find him somewhere on the plain, even as we found you."

"Have you searched long?"

"Nearly four hours."

"What time is it, then?"

"I know not, but I should fancy it wants about two hours of daybreak."

"No more?"

"I fancy not."

"We must be speedy, then," said Turpin, who every moment recovered himself more and more, for the hurts he had received were really most insignificant. "We must find some safe hiding-place between now and daylight. It will never do for either the prince or ourselves to remain here."

"Very true, Dick; and so, if you are strong enough, we will resume our search for Claude at once."

"Oh, yes, I am strong enough; and you, my prince, what will you do?"

"With your permission, accompany you."

"You are most welcome so to do, but let me ask you the question that was asked of me, 'Are you strong enough?'"

"I think so. At any rate I will make the attempt, if you will lead the way."

"Agreed, my prince. I think, under all circumstances, you will be safest in our company, and should you feel the exertion beyond your powers, we can each take it in turns to support you."

"You are brave fellows," said Prince Charles. "Would that I had had a few more in my army like you, and the result would have been very different."

To this speech neither of our friends made any reply. It was a delicate point to talk upon.

Instead of speaking, then, they stooped down and took up their torches, and set forward again on their dreary task of turning over and peering into the countenance of every dead and wounded body to which they came.

The time that this consumed was really prodigious, but they toiled manfully at it.

Whatever amount of feebleness Dick Turpin might have felt, he allowed none whatever to be seen, and no one would have credited that he was so near death so short a time before.

As Dick would insist upon carrying a torch, the chief part of the pulling about fell to the share of Sixteen-String Jack, who was the only one who had his two hands at liberty, for the young prince walked by the aid of a sword which he had picked up, and which he used as a walking-stick.

On, on they went, with the same success. Hundreds of bodies had passed under their notice, but not the one they sought.

For some little time now the moon had been completely hidden by clouds, and the only light they had was such as the torches afforded them.

But now the moon broke forth again.

She was low down on the horizon, and her splendour was dimmed by the vapours that were floating in the atmosphere, and the rays which she cast upon the battlefield were dull and sickly.

But, by contrast with the darkness that had previously prevailed, they seemed comparatively bright.

Our friends were certainly enabled to see to a greater distance around them than they were before.

Sixteen-String Jack happened to stand up just as the moon thus broke forth, having been for the past few moments busily engaged in disentangling a body of men.

As he looked round, he said—

"Tom—Tom!"

"Yes."

"Glance about you. Don't this place look familiar to you?"

"It does, rather. We have been here before."

"We have, that's very true, but when?"

"We have not been going over the same ground again in our search, have we?" asked Dick Turpin.

"No, no, I don't mean that; but it was just about this spot that we were when the enemy charged upon us."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, I can tell it by that little mound of earth there, which is just where we fell."

"I know it now," said Tom King, "though I did not at first."

"And Claude was with you, you say?" said Turpin, interrogating.

"He was."

"And thrown down with you?"

"To the best of our belief."

"Then it appears to me this is the most likely spot to find him."

"But we have already searched it."

"And you found him not?"

"No."

"But did you look closely?"

"Pretty well; and yet not so closely as we have done in other places."

"How was that?"

"It was before we had a torch."

"Then I have hopes yet. We shall find him here or nowhere."

"That was what we ourselves thought, but since we have had the torches we have not been able to find the place, and, so far as my knowledge goes, this is the first time we have reached it since."

"Come on, then. My prince, you are fatigued."

"I am, in truth."

"Then seat yourself upon this mound. It will provide you with a tolerably good resting-place. There seems to be no one in this part of the field but ourselves, so you will be in no danger. We are only going to search round about this place."

The young prince was only too glad to do as Dick Turpin suggested.

He seated himself and watched them.

After a few minutes the three friends came to a place where some twelve or fourteen bodies had all been displaced, and turned face upwards by some one whose errand was doubtless the same as theirs—namely, to discover a missing friend among the slain.

One of these arrested their attention immediately.

The moon shone with great clearness upon it.

Extended upon his back at full length—his legs straight and placed close together—his arms outstretched—his head thrown back, and his eyes closed—presenting, in fine, all the appearance of a dead body, was he whom they had for so long vainly sought.

Claude Duval!

CHAPTER CCIII.

THE YOUNG PRINCE AND HIS ADHERENTS HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THEIR ENEMIES.

DICK TURPIN held his torch still closer over the prostrate form.

His apparel was besmeared with blood.

Blood, too, was on his hair, his face, his hands, and all around him.

Sixteen-String Jack stood motionless for a moment.

Although it was in some such plight as this which he had all along anticipated he should find his friend, yet he had at the same time cheated himself with the hope that he should find him in a much better condition than that in which he had found him.

But it was only for a moment that he allowed this feeling to retain possession of him.

Dropping his sword, he sank upon his knees, and placed his hand eagerly over his old comrade's heart.

The two others looked on in anxious suspense to know the result.

"Does he live, Jack?" they asked.

A minute elapsed, and then he replied—

"I cannot tell. I am too excited. Do you, my friend, kneel down and try. I fancy every now and then that I can feel a slight pulsation, but that may, perhaps, be in my own hand."

He drew back as he spoke, and Turpin, kneeling down, placed his hand under Claude's apparel, and immediately above the region of the heart.

"He is not dead yet," he said. "There is a pulsation, but it is so slight as almost to elude detection. We must be prompt, and we may yet restore him to life."

"I see no wound of any magnitude," said Tom King; "at all events, not one that looks as though it was sufficient to cause death. Can you?"

"No, but there is a very ugly gash in his left arm. Give me the bottle with the rum in it, and I will pour some gently down his throat."

"If there is any life in him," said Tom, as he gave Dick the article he asked for, "that will bring it back."

And the result exactly justified the words, for Dick's foot happening to slip as he was in the act of gently pouring a small quantity of spirit into his companion's mouth,

about twice as much had run from the bottle than he had intended.

The effect of this upon Claude was for a minute rather alarming.

From being ashy pale, his face turned first red, then purple, and finally almost black.

A convulsive, choking movement shook his body from head to foot.

Dick dropped the bottle, and placed his arm under his head.

Then he raised him to a sitting posture.

No sooner was this done than a violent fit of coughing attacked Claude.

But our friends were by no means displeased to see this symptom of returning life.

"Give him a little more rum, Tom," said Turpin. "That will put him right. I dropped the bottle, but I don't think it is all spilled."

"No, there is a little left," said Tom. "Here, Claude, drink this."

Claude Duval swallowed about a tablespoonful of it, and then made an effort to rise.

But this his friends would not suffer him to do just at present.

They forced him to lie down.

Sixteen-String Jack addressed him.

"Speak, Claude!" he said. "Tell us, are you bodily hurt? Speak!"

"What has happened?" asked Duval, in whose brain the rum had produced a temporary confusion. "What is all this?"

"It means," replied Jack, "that the battle is over, and that we have found you among the wounded."

Claude was silent.

He was trying to recall his recollection.

"I remember now," he said, at length. "We were thrown down, and, ere I could recover myself, several fell upon me. I made several efforts to rise, but had not strength enough to do so. Nevertheless, I struggled to some distance, and then something struck me on the head. I think it was a bullet. I had been previously wounded in the left arm, and I lost a great deal of blood."

"Come—come," said Turpin. "Thank the fates, you will soon be all right; it is not half so bad as I expected; and as for the wound in your head, it can't be much, or you would not be able to speak as you do. Do you think you could rise and walk with Jack's assistance?"

"I think so. I do not feel so strong as I did a little while ago, but yet I think I could manage that."

"So do I; and besides, the sooner we are away the better. Dawn cannot be far distant. The young prince, too, is here, and waiting for us."

"He has escaped, then?"

"Without a scratch."

"Help me up, then; that's it. And you, Dick, and Tom, and Jack, I see you all around me. Have you all got off unhurt?"

"I might almost say so. We are knocked about a little, but that is all."

"Hurrah, then! That news makes me a better man directly. And now, where are we going?"

"I will speak to the prince."

"Do so."

"We will follow, then. Tom and Jack can support me between them."

"Good."

Dick Turpin, who had quite recovered from the effects of the slight hurts he had received, made his way at a run to the mound upon which the young prince was sitting.

It was distant about a hundred yards from where they had found Claude.

Upon a nearer approach he saw Prince Charles was seated in an attitude of deep dejected thought.

His elbows were resting on his knees, and his face was completely buried in his hands.

What his meditations were, who can tell?

So deeply did they absorb him that he had forgotten everything, even the place where he then was, and the danger by which he was surrounded.

He had forgotten that any one had been with him, and though they were so close at hand, he had not noticed the discovery of Claude.

So absorbed was he, that he did not hear the bold highwayman's approach.

Dick was embarrassed.

Time was precious, and yet he scarcely felt inclined to invade the privacy of the young prince's grief—for grief he could tell it was.

He knew how bitterly he must feel his defeat—that defeat which he had met in an hour when he confidently expected victory.

That his cause was now completely, hopelessly lost, he could not but be aware, nor could he blind his eyes to the fact that there would never be a hope again of raising an army in favour of his rights.

The rest of his life would be a weary blank, and when he died it must be with the conviction that he had left a great purpose unachieved.

Turpin coughed in the hope that that would arouse the prince. But no, his abstraction was too deep for that.

At last, feeling that it would never do to longer hesitate, he ventured to draw yet nearer, and touch him on the shoulder.

Charles Stuart started up instantly.

There was alarm visible in his countenance, but the moment his eye fell upon our friend, and he recognised him, the expression changed at once.

"Ha!" he said. "What is it now?"

"Pardon me, my prince," said Turpin, making a low obeisance as he spoke, "pardon me. I should not have ventured to disturb you only it was so urgent."

"Do not apologise, I beg."

"We have found our companion, and he is, I am pleased to say, but very slightly hurt."

"I am glad of that."

"I knew you would be, for he is one of the most devoted of your adherents, my prince."

"But why did you come to me?"

"It is now time to leave the battle-field. Every moment now that we stay is fraught with danger. Dawn is very close at hand. Tell us, my prince, in which direction shall we escort you."

"It does not matter now. Anywhere. To me one place is the same as another, and the grave the most acceptable of all."

"You are full of gloomy thoughts, my prince. Discard them. I am one who has known many a reverse of fortune, but I never allow myself to be cast down. I have that within me which makes me fight to the last."

"But, then, you had something to fight for."

"And so have you."

"What?"

"Your life!"

"The thing with which I would most gladly part."

"It may be now, my prince, that you feel weary of it, but there are others who would not be willing for you to quit this world. Live, if you can, and never yield your life until you are compelled, for it is a possession which once lost can never be regained."

The prince smiled faintly.

"Besides," continued Dick, "if you live you know not what time may yet bring forth. While there is life there is hope. Cling to it to the last."

"I will," said Charles. "You have made me lighter-hearted already."

"I am glad; and now let us depart. Which way shall we take? Yonder are our friends; they have halted there because they saw we were engaged in conversation."

"Call them, then. For myself, I know not which way to turn to escape my enemies, but doubtless they will be able to give us some information."

Dick Turpin beckoned with his hand for the three others to approach, for, as he had said, observing he was in deep and earnest conversation with the young prince, they had halted when they were out of earshot.

But upon perceiving Dick's signal, they instantly came to where he stood.

All three saluted the prince, and stood in silence.

Charles Stuart spoke—

"I cannot tell you which way to take," he said; "I must leave that to you."

"Then," said Tom King, "if you would permit me to advise"—

"Say on."

"A remnant of the army, which still hang together, is not very far from here. Would you like us to join them?"

"What do you advise? I have every confidence in your judgment."

"Union is strength," replied Tom. "I think we cannot do harm by joining them. We shall then see better how things stand, and form a more precise opinion of the general complexion of affairs."

"Your words are wise. It shall be done. Who can lead the way in the required direction?"

"I can."

"Do so then."

"The path lies in a direct line across the battle-field, my prince. Would you please follow in my steps?"

CHAPTER CCIV.

OUR FRIENDS ESCAPE BY A HAIR-BREADTH A GREAT DANGER ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

JUST as the little party set themselves in motion, a faint white light appeared in the eastern horizon, which gradually diffused itself over all things.

The dawn had at last come.

It made the dismal scene by which they were surrounded look very chill, and very, very ghastly.

The upturned faces of the dead bodies that strewed their path seemed of a preternatural whiteness.

The morning came on with alarming rapidity; at least, it seemed so to our friends, the peril of whose situation grew greater as it advanced.

The distance they had to go across the open plain to reach the spot of which Tom spoke was very considerable, and they could not make such speed as they wished for several reasons, not the least of which was the numerous bodies and pools of blood through which they had to pick their way.

Those who followed kept continually glancing around them, in order that no foe should approach them at unawares; but, so far as they could tell at present, they seemed to have the place quite to themselves.

The many little parties of searchers had one by one disappeared, and now not one remained in sight.

When near the outskirts, however, Tom King perceived before him in the distance two mounted soldiers approaching.

They were too far removed for him to be able to say whether they were friends or foes.

In this state of things, he deemed it best to halt at once.

"What are you stopping for, Tom?" asked Dick, in some surprise.

"Two mounted soldiers are coming at a gallop from the very place, apparently, to which we are going. Whether they are or are not our enemies, I cannot from this distance make out. They are as likely to be one as the other."

"I see them," cried his auditors, "and I can see more behind. They are our enemies."

"Down, then," cried Tom King, who did not stop to see whether his comrades were right; "down with you, every one, or we shall be perceived, and then it will be too late!"

"I understand," said Turpin. "You mean us to feign death."

"Exactly. If they are our friends who are now coming we can easily make ourselves known to them, and if they are our enemies they will pass us by."

"I trust they may. I can hear their hoofs now I am upon the ground. They are in good force, be they whom they may."

"Crawl along out of the way," cried Tom, "we seem now to be in their direct line, and it will be no treat to be ridden over by a detachment of cavalry."

This was a fact that did not need impressing upon any of them, and they crawled away as fast as they were able in the direction of the other dead bodies on the plain.

When fairly amongst these, they threw themselves down into various attitudes, and remained profoundly still.

Tramp—tramp—tramp, the hollow beat of the horses' hoofs, coming at one steady pace, reached their ears with greater plainness every moment.

Dick Turpin had managed to dispose himself so that he could obtain a view of the ground before him.

In a few minutes, the two soldiers who rode first, came

near enough for him to distinguish their uniforms, and he said, in a low tone—

"Lie still, my friends, and simulate death as well as you can. They are our foes who are now approaching."

The words were, of course, enough to make them obey instantly.

That they would safely escape the scrutiny of the soldiers there seemed every probability, provided they properly carried out the character they had assumed.

Dick Turpin was lying with his body partially concealed behind that of one of the king's soldiers, and being thus screened, he was able to continue his watch without any fear of being noticed.

All he hoped was, the troop would continue in the same direction as they had begun, for if they did, it would then bring them past where our friends lay at a distance of several yards from them.

And now the two soldiers who were, he supposed, sent on as a kind of advance-guard to reconnoitre, he found were gradually slanting towards him.

Still he hoped they would pass, or, at all events, that they would not discover them, for, if they did, their case would be hopeless; for against such a superior force it would be madness to contend.

Apparently, however, they looked neither to the right nor the left, but kept straight on their course.

Dick ceased to look, and held his breath.

The two soldiers swept past.

But they were very near them, and he thought it very questionable whether the troop behind would pass without trampling over them.

"I fear we have not got far enough away," he said to his comrades, who were very anxious about their position, but yet dared not move. "But, if they do, you must bear it, and not betray your being in life if you can possibly help it, or we are lost indeed."

"All right, Dick."

"Silence, now. They are coming."

And, in fact, the jingling of their weapons and accoutrements could now be heard among the medley of other sounds, and this alone was enough to indicate their proximity, and the consequent necessity there was for them to keep silent.

Stiffening themselves in their different positions, they steeled themselves to bear the worst.

But fickle Fortune for once was on the side of the highwaymen and the persecuted young prince.

The body of troops, to the number of two hundred, passed by.

They were not seen.

They were not ridden over.

Nor was their ruse suspected even, let alone detected.

The troop rode in a compact body, and took its way across the battle-field in the direction where the king's army was encamped.

Dick waited for a long time before he would allow his companions to move, and before he ventured to move himself.

He feared there might be some stragglers, and to be seen by any one of them would have been fatal.

But at last they rose, all thankful for the narrow escape they had had, but yet wishing they had been able to pass on their way unhindered.

While they had laid there, however imperative the necessity might be, they had lost much valuable time.

Not only had day dawned, but the sun had risen, and all around them could be seen with the greatest distinctness.

While crossing the open space, they could not fail to be conspicuous objects.

There was no help for it, however: they must run the risk of being seen.

At the best speed of which they were capable, then, they crossed the remainder of the moor, but, fortunately for their chances of not being discovered, the distance they had to go was but short.

In going that distance, too, they were so lucky as not to perceive a single person.

All of them much wished, of course, that they were provided with steeds, but they did not waste any time in vain regrets.

Under the direction of Tom King, they took the way which he believed would bring them up with the remaining portion of the Pretender's army.

But, though they toiled on for many hours, they could neither see nor hear any indications of its presence.

The road wound in between inaccessible and lofty rocks.

It was hard and difficult to travel, but still, without uttering a word of complaint, they kept steadily on.

Several times during their journey they were forced to hide from their foes, either by ascending trees or crouching behind huge masses of rock.

But, so far, they had kept clear of all mischances.

In this way they continued until night began to fall.

Then they were all tired and hungry. They had during their march rested many times, and eaten such food as they carried with them, but, nevertheless, when darkness began to close around them, and they saw nothing in advance to make them think they were nearing the flying army, they felt the absolute necessity for a long rest and sleep.

Besides, without a guide it would be in the dark most dangerous to attempt to continue in the path they were travelling, for they had reached the wildest part of Invernesshire, and their path lay constantly amid the mountains.

At times there would be upon one side of them a precipitous wall of cliff, the top of which would tower high above their heads.

Then on the other there would be a deep abyss—sometimes the bed of a mountain stream, at other times a precipice forming the brink of a ravine.

A short council was held as to what they had better do, when they decided that they would push on as long as they had light to do so, in the hope that they might reach some place where they could pass the night in greater comfort than they could in the open air.

From their enemies, the king's troops, they did not consider they had much to fear. The region into which they had penetrated was one into which they would not care to venture, and as for any of the inhabitants that they might find in that inhospitable region, the young Prince fully counted upon their loyalty and devotion to him not to seek to do him injury.

Whether he was right in holding this good opinion, or whether he was not, we shall very shortly see.

When it grew quite dark, which was not long, for it is one of the peculiarities of mountain districts that night comes on with great rapidity, they found themselves apparently as far off their object as ever.

Their own safety at last compelled them to come to a halt.

What they should do next was a question that increased in difficulty every moment.

The prospect of having to sleep all night upon the hard rocks was anything but an agreeable one.

"Are there no shepherds' huts about this place?" asked Turpin.

"I know not," replied the prince.

"There is a narrow footpath here, which seems to lead off among the mountains. Perhaps that may conduct to one."

"But the passage of it may be dangerous."

"With your permission, I will go alone, and ascertain."

"No!" interrupted the young prince, "let us all keep together. The path seems smooth, though narrow. I think, by exercising common caution, we may ascertain to what place it leads, and I am sure, gentlemen, I think it will be worth the trouble to try to ascertain."

CHAPTER CCV.

THE HIGHLAND BANDITTI IN THE CAVERN FIND THE PRINCE AND HIS FRIENDS FOOD AND SHELTER.

"UNDOUBTEDLY so, my prince," replied Tom King; "but, as you see, the path is very narrow."

"Well?"

"Then, as I proposed it, I hope you will allow me the privilege of going first."

"With all my heart, but pray take care. It would be sad indeed for a brave, gallant heart, like you are to quit life in so dismal a fashion as falling over some deep precipice."

Tom laughed, and commenced traversing the narrow mountain path which he had been the first to discover.

The others were compelled to follow him in Indian file,

for in no place was it wide enough for two to walk abreast.

Tom King, as we have said, went first.

Dick Turpin followed.

Then came the young prince.

The rear was brought up by Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval.

The latter was much better than, under all the circumstances, he could be hoped to be; but Claude had not only an iron constitution but an iron will, which enabled him to triumph over the infirmities of the body.

But, for all that, his unsteady gait proclaimed the debility under which he was labouring.

The mountain path was long and tortuous.

To add to its difficulties, too, it had an upward tendency, and in places the incline was so steep that they had much ado to ascend it.

But the sides were all the time hemmed in with walls of rock, so the only danger they ran was that of losing their proper path, or of some of the pieces of rock above falling upon them.

But this last was such a remote contingency that it scarcely, if at all, entered into their calculations.

On they went steadily and perseveringly.

They were encouraged to proceed by the conviction that grew in force in the breasts of all of them that this well-kept path must lead somewhere or other.

And the end showed them to be perfectly correct.

The path terminated upon a kind of plateau, about halfway up the side of a tall mountain.

Three sides of this plateau were hemmed in by the mountain.

The fourth was the one by which our friends had gained it.

As soon as they stood upon this place they saw before them a fissure in the rock.

But in the darkness the fissure would never have been visible, save from one circumstance.

It was faintly lighted up.

Our friends almost hailed the sight with a shout of welcome, but prudence restrained the sound.

They did not know yet who or what they had to deal with.

This, however, from what the reader already knows of the highwaymen's characters, was a state of things that was not likely to be of any great duration.

Without speaking a word, but motioning to the rest to remain where they were and be silent, Tom King crept forward carefully to reconnoitre.

The fissure in the rock was soon reached.

He peered cautiously round the side of it.

The sight which met his gaze was at once well qualified to call forth his pleasure and admiration.

At the further extremity of a large cavern, hollowed by the hand of nature out of primeval rock, was a huge fire.

It seemed to be composed entirely of wood, and it burned with great briskness, and the glow it cast irradiated the whole place.

Before this fire, on a very rude spit indeed, hung what in the distance looked like either a pig or a sheep, but Tom could not tell which.

And this was not all he saw.

There were, as might be supposed, some human occupants of this place.

They were six highland soldiers.

Great brawny men they were, real types of their class, but their faces were pinched and hollow, and their uniform hung in tatters about them.

This unlooked for spectacle, full of picturesqueness as it was, made Tom King remain at the entrance of the cave immovable.

His friends, who could not any longer curb their impatience, crept towards him.

He heard them coming, but, ere he could turn or speak, they had reached the spot, and had seen the same as he had, and with equal astonishment.

For a moment they stood as he had.

But, as may be anticipated, they had made some slight noise in their approach, and the highlanders had heard it.

Not dreading anything in the shape of an attack, they had laid aside the heavier portions of their armour.

But, seizing their swords with martial quickness, they ran towards the outlet of the cave.

Had it not been for the presence of the young prince, the position of our friends would have been rather desperate.

He, however, in a moment recognised the features of the men before him.

He had noticed them in the battle, where they had made themselves conspicuous by their daring actions.

Without the least hesitation, he took off his plumed hat, and walked quietly a pace or two inside the cave.

The man who had hastened forward with such fierce gestures stopped abruptly.

They knew him.

Despite his haggard look, despite his ragged dress, for the day's scrambling over rocks, and the stains of battle had not improved it, they knew him.

With one accord, then, and as though each breast was simultaneously animated by the same impulse, they all sank down upon their knees, and bowed their heads in reverent submission.

It would be by no means an easy task to define the feeling which these lawless, uncivilized men had for their prince. In it there was no slight trait of ancient feudalism, and this is scarcely to be wondered at, when we consider how long that system of government was retained in the highlands by the more powerful chiefs.

These six men, as their plaid indicated, were members of the clan of Macdonald, who, to the last, remained steadfast to the Pretender's cause, and, unlike others, boldly and defiantly proclaimed it.

These Macdonalds, then, in the cave, with their rude and uncultivated intellects, looked upon a Stuart as a being second only to the Deity himself, and they paid respect to this last representative of the ancient and once powerful race.

And here let us remark that this incident is no fiction. These men actually had existence, and were found in the cavern by the prince, and received him in the manner we have described; and no better proof of their loyalty can be given than that not even the large reward of £30,000 offered for the prince's head would tempt them to betray him.

Divided between them, it must be borne in mind that this large sum would be sufficient to provide them with an ample income for the remainder of their lives; and many a man has been tempted into committing the most atrocious crimes for less than half such an inducement.

But the prince trusted these men. In fact, he felt quite safe with them, and assured that nothing whatever would tempt them to betray him.

He bowed deeply in return to their salutation, and in a pleasant tone of voice bade them rise.

This they did, and stood with their arms still folded on their breasts, and their eyes bent upon the ground.

Prince Charles advanced, followed by the four highwaymen, who had witnessed this scene with the greatest astonishment.

Of course, they did not feel that amount of reliance upon the fidelity of these highlanders that the prince did. But, upon their parts, this was nothing more than natural. They did not know their loyal nature, and in their lives they had seen enough of human nature to make them more than ordinarily suspicious.

Everything was done by these men that lay in their power to make the young prince and his companions comfortable.

A couple of rude benches were placed at a convenient distance from the fire for them to sit upon, and they warmed themselves until the roast was finished.

It was a small sheep, which had by some means or other fallen into their hands—most likely it had been "lifted," as they called taking things when there was no one looking—but, whether this was so or not, the sheep was there.

As it was the least trouble, the sheep had just been trussed and hung before the fire, whole as it was.

It was suspended from the roof of the cavern by a stout rope.

The prince and his friends arrived just in time, for the sheep was almost cooked.

The mode in which they ate it was at once singular and picturesque.

The only implement they had to serve them for both knife and fork was their daggers.

But hungry men are always willing to put up with

some trifling inconvenience when an enticing meal is before them.

The daggers were sharp, and so one by one, with great dexterity, they went up to the fire, and each one cut off a slice as the meat hung before the fire.

Of course the prince was allowed the precedence, and then our friends followed.

The slices they each cut off were really prodigious, but by the time the six gigantic highlanders had taken their portion, there was little more than a frame of bones left behind.

In fact, a glance into their gaunt countenances would have been enough to show that their fare had lately been of the hardest.

For about a quarter of an hour nothing was heard in the cave but the grinding of jaws.

After a time, however, their appetites were appeased, and then they felt a new want.

Like the want of food, it was imperative.

Sleep.

That was what they all required.

The prince set the example to the rest by flinging himself full length upon the rocky floor of the cavern before the fire.

One by one the others followed him, and lay down likewise.

All but one highlander, and he was posted at the entrance of the cave as a sentinel, in order to give the alarm to his slumbering companions in case any danger should present itself.

So passed the night.

The sentinel nodded, but there was no need in reality for keeping watch.

CHAPTER CCVI.

THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND SURROUNDS THE MOUNTAIN CAVERN.—THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER'S STRATAGEM.

This cave, which had been so providentially discovered by the young prince and his four followers, afforded them a shelter for five weeks.

At frequent intervals during that period single spies had been sent forth to reconnoitre, but they all returned with the same intelligence.

The closest search was being made in every direction by the Duke of Cumberland for the young prince, and they were in imminent danger of being discovered in their hiding-place.

But they did not dare to leave it, as by so doing they would only have exposed themselves to fresh dangers.

By the advice, however, of Dick Turpin, the pathway, in its narrowest part between the rocks, had been choked up by a huge fragment of stone, which had been cast down from the crags above.

The only way by which the cave could be gained and left was by a route circuitous and difficult.

During these five weeks they had been several times driven to great straits for the procurement of sufficient food, and, indeed, the chief thing they had to subsist upon was the flesh of such wild goats as they were lucky enough to capture.

And here we pause a moment to supply an omission. No doubt many of our readers have asked "What became of Black Bess all this time? Where did Turpin lodge her?"

Strictly speaking, we should have related in its proper place that, after joining the prince's army, Dick naturally felt unwilling to run the risk of taking his valuable mare with him during the campaign, and he had said as much to Prince Charles.

His half-implied request met with immediate attention, and one night during their stay at the house of a Scottish gentleman, Sir Kenneth Grant, the prince personally requested him to take care of his friend's mare until such time as he should come or send for her.

This Sir Kenneth readily promised to do, and so Black Bess had been in safety and security, while her owner had been so many times in such great peril.

The mass of incident pressing upon us for speedy recital drove this from our mind, and so it was not set down in the proper place, and with this explanation we will leave it, trusting that the time is not far distant when Dick Turpin, the highwayman, will mount his bonny



[THE YOUNG PRETENDER AND HIS FRIENDS ARE SHIPWRECKED ON THE COAST OF BARRA.]

mare, Black Bess, and resume his old daring and romantic career.

For a little while, however, we must continue to follow his fortunes with the Young Pretender.

It is, then, five weeks, or rather more, after the night when they found shelter in the cavern, that we again introduce them to the reader.

The youngest of the six highlanders had just returned from a spying expedition.

The intelligence he brought back was most alarming. Under the direction of the Duke of Cumberland, orders had been transmitted to all the towns and villages along the two arms of the sea, between Inverness and Edinburgh, to stop any person without a passport from the duke himself, or the magistrates of Edinburgh. The same instructions were also sent to all the seaports of Great Britain, prohibiting all masters of merchant vessels from receiving any person on board without a passport, or contributing in any manner to the escape of a rebel (for such, of course, was the term applied to all the young prince's adherents),

under pain of high treason, and of being liable to the same punishment as those who had taken arms.

And this was not all, for the duke had also, at the same time, detached his cavalry into the low country at the foot of the mountains, to seize all those who might present themselves without passports to cross the first arm of the sea, with orders to send out continual patrols along the coast, and to search all the towns and villages in the neighbourhood of the sea.

The principal, and indeed the sole object which the duke had in taking all these proceedings, was to secure the body of the Young Pretender; and it states in history that his instructions to his commanders were, not to take him a prisoner, but to put him to instant death.

It was in consequence of this cruel and savage order, as well as the other atrocities committed by his sanction, that he obtained the nickname by which he was ever afterwards known of "the Butcher."

This news naturally filled the prince and the few devoted adherents with him with alarm and almost despair.

Unable to leave their present shelter, they were like rats who had taken refuge in a trap, for they felt certain if the duke continued his search, as doubtless he would do, their hiding-place would be discovered, and the force of their enemies so overwhelming, that resistance would be quite out of the question.

In this state of affairs much anxious consultation took place.

The young prince himself laboured under a great depression of spirits, so that our friends had the direction of affairs almost in their own hands.

One of the things they deemed advisable was to send a man to the highest portion of the mountain, or the place from which the most extensive view of the surrounding scenery could be obtained, who was to keep a vigilant watch, and give them timely notice should any of the enemy approach.

This duty was taken in turns by the six highlanders, for our friends had not the same ability to scale the precipitous rocks that these hardy Scots had.

By this time, we ought to say, Claude Duval had quite recovered from his wounds.

The one in his arm, although it looked by far the worse of the two, got well first; the one in his head, which had been caused by a bullet, had given them a great deal of trouble.

But now it was quite well, and he was once more the same man as he had formerly been.

Their looks, however, had by no means improved during their stay, but such a triviality as that was not likely to concern them much.

As the five sat around the fire—that is to say, the prince and the four highwaymen—they looked about as lugubrious as they well could. Tom King especially, for he had two causes for vexation: his companions were disheartened at their lot, and he felt that it was through his advocacy of the step that they had taken it, and they seemed to be a continual reproach; and in the second place, he was deeply concerned for the position of Prince Charles.

Moodyly, therefore, they all sat around the fire.

The gloom which hung around the prince seemed also to envelop them.

What to do, or how they were to hope to make their escape, they knew not.

Could they but gain the sea-shore at Lochnanuagh, near which place the men in the cave informed them the MacDonalds and the Camerons would be found, they doubted not that these powerful chieftains would find some means of evading the embargo which the sanguinary duke had laid; but to reach this much-desired spot they would have to cross the line which the king's troops formed across the country.

To accomplish this feat seemed absolutely impossible, and, in fact, was so while their vigilance continued as active as it then was.

And so, with this uppermost in their minds, each one seeking to find some way out of the difficulty, but without success, all five sat gazing at the embers of the fire.

Apart from them, and quite out of earshot, were the five highlanders.

The sixth was outside on guard.

Like the others, they looked dejected and hopeless, occasionally speaking to each other in a low tone, in their own uncouth, guttural language.

And so the night passed.

How it was the duke had failed to discover their hiding-place they could not think; and yet, when we take the size of the country into consideration, it was not so remarkable as it looked.

Morning came.

Those in the cave did not observe the flush of dawn, but they were made aware of it by the signal of their comrade who was on guard outside, and who had been long anxiously looking for it.

Another of the men was sent on duty, and the one who had passed the night on the lonely peaks above came in.

He was the youngest of these highland banditti, and there was in his youthful countenance an expression of ingenuousness of which the others were altogether destitute.

His resemblance in complexion and general features of countenance to the Young Pretender had been

frequently remarked by all present; and by any one who was not in the habit of seeing them together, ~~was~~ one might be mistaken for the other.

Of course, as is the case with most such likenesses, they ceased to be striking when the two were seen side by side, for then the little differences which existed showed themselves.

The frank behaviour of this young man made him a general favourite with all; and many a time, when all the rest had been desponding as they were now, he had infused hope into their breasts by his own sanguine enthusiasm.

But on the present occasion it was noticed, when he returned, his face was totally changed.

It was stern and determined, as though he had resolved upon some course of action which it would require all his nerve to carry out.

And his face was a true index of what was really the case. He had resolved upon a particular plan of action, and the result of it was to save his prince and free him from the perils that surrounded him.

What this plan of action was the next few lines will speedily develop.

It was, indeed, one that made it necessary for him to summon up all his self-command—all his stoicism—all his loyalty for the unfortunate prince he served.

The change in his looks and manner was noticed by all present, but no remark was made. No doubt it was thought that he, like them, had at last succumbed to that despair which weighed upon their own minds.

The young highlander, however, ate some food in silence. Then he called one of his comrades apart, and spoke.

What he said none knew; but those who had the curiosity to look on saw that a look of admiration overspread the features of the man addressed, which in a moment afterwards changed to the deepest and utmost dissuasion.

CHAPTER CVII.

SUSPICION IS GENERATED IN DICK TURPIN'S BREAST BY THE MYSTERIOUS CONDUCT OF THE HIGHLANDERS.

ONE by one, however, the young highlander called his comrades aside, and addressed them.

From some he received encouragement; from others—and these were the ones who felt the deepest interest in his welfare—the reverse.

But by his way it could be seen that his mind was firmly made up—that what he heard made no difference to him—that he merely submitted his intention to them for the purpose of obtaining their opinion, and yet not for that opinion to bias him.

But the oldest highlander, who seemed to have some degree of command over the rest, addressed him earnestly; and in the end it would seem that they managed in some way to compromise the matter between themselves.

Dick Turpin had not failed to notice these whispered conferences between the men, and apprised his three friends of it.

In common with himself they looked upon it with apprehension.

For their own parts, they had no great faith in the devotion of these men like the young prince had, but then they had all four during their careers seen quite enough to make them distrustful.

They knew how great a temptation a reward of £30,000 would be to any one, but especially to these men, who were not only in want of the necessaries of life, but had also placed themselves in a position of great danger.

Of course, if they remained where they were and were discovered with the prince (and that they would be one long discovered appeared a certainty), their lives, as well as his, would be taken; but if, on the other hand, they betrayed him, they would receive the reward, and not only that, but a free pardon also, for such was the condition attached to the proclamation of the reward.

These, it must be conceded, were powerful inducements to make these men act treacherously to their prince, and it was while having these considerations in view, that the highwaymen were suspicious of them.

Immediately after sunrise one of the men was sent out as a spy.

Our friends would fain have prevented his departure, but they were unable to do so.

The man left

Full of fresh uneasiness, our friends whispered to each other, and consulted as to what course they should pursue in this alarming crisis of their fortunes. They wished to communicate their suspicions to the prince, but he was so cast down that, for compassion's sake, they forbore to do so.

And so, with their minds in a state of indescribable anxiety and suspense, the time wore on.

And to the credit of the highwaymen be it said that, though they might have found safety in flight, they did not attempt to gain it. A desertion of the man who had so amazingly favoured them at such a time they felt to be an act of baseness such as they would never commit, let things eventuate how they might.

They waited, therefore, to see what would happen next. They had steeled themselves to hear the worst.

Above all, they kept a keen eye upon the young highlander whose conduct had first excited their suspicion, but in his countenance, stern and severe as it was, they saw nothing to indicate a traitor.

They were perplexed, too, by the behaviour of the others, for whenever they looked upon them their faces assumed an expression compounded strangely of compassion and admiration.

What this meant the highwaymen were unable to conclude.

But the day, contrary to their expectations, wore away without any new danger manifesting itself.

The man, however, who had been ostensibly sent out as a spy, did not return.

To be sure, on former occasions they had been absent for much longer periods, and their absence unnoticed or uncommented on, but now our friends counted every hour with feverish eagerness.

At last, to so great a pitch did their impatience and uneasiness rise, that they left the fire, and made their way to the entrance of the cave.

It was quite dark.

No moon lighted up the wild and magnificent scenery by which they were encompassed, and the pale, twinkling stars only partially defined the huge mountains in their immediate vicinity.

A dead silence was around them, unbroken even by the murmuring of the wind among those shrubs which found a scanty sustenance upon the rocky soil.

It was, too, intensely cold, and, as is generally the case under such circumstances, the air was very clear, and capable of carrying the faintest sound to a great distance.

It was while they stood upon the small plateau, which we have already mentioned as being outside the cave, that all four were startled by a slight noise.

It came suddenly, and ceased with equal abruptness, leaving those who heard it no opportunity of learning what it was.

They listened, however, with great eagerness for the repetition of the sound.

Nor was it long in coming.

A little while, and then they felt certain some one was approaching the spot upon which they stood.

But who?

It was too dark, and the corner was too distant for them to distinguish him.

It might be, and probably was, the spy who had been sent into the morning returning.

It would be no harm, the highwaymen thought, to draw aside and see who it really was, without affording any indication of their presence.

To conceal themselves by standing in the shadow of the rocks was an easy enough matter, and they executed the manœuvre in perfect silence.

Plainer and plainer grew the sound which they had at first heard.

One person only was coming they felt certain, but the intense silence and sonorosity of the air had deceived them with regard to the distance he was from them, and they had to wait for his making his appearance much longer than they anticipated.

But at length he came.

Their vision had become accustomed to the darkness, and they saw a dark figure creeping stealthily up the steep pathway leading to the plateau.

When he drew himself up and stood before them, they found their conjectures correct.

It was the highlander who had been sent out to recon-

noitre the position of the enemy, and bring back a report.

He did not hesitate or even glance around him, but walked straight to the entrance of the cave.

Our friends felt almost ashamed of themselves for the suspicions they had harboured, so unsinister was the behaviour of this man.

Nevertheless, they allowed him to enter the cave, and when the sound of his footsteps had quite died away, they listened again.

But this time all was still.

Feeling all but convinced that they had misinterpreted what they had seen, they returned to the cave.

When they entered, they saw in a moment that the spy who had come back had brought with him some intelligence of rather a startling kind.

All were crowding round him, and it could be easily seen that he shared to the full the excitement which every one experienced.

This made the highwaymen hasten forward to listen to what he was saying.

We will not tire the patience of the reader by repeating the speech in his own outlandish dialect, but reduce the substance of it to plain English.

"On all sides," he said, "the king's troops were surrounding them. The Duke of Cumberland was furious at the delay which had already taken place in not capturing the young prince, and had issued his orders in a more peremptory manner than before. To still further exert the men, he had determined upon taking the task of hunting him (the prince) to death in his own person, and that very day had set out, at the head of a large detachment of foot-soldiers. Some suspicion as to his whereabouts appeared to hold a place in the duke's breast, and he was conducting the search with the greatest circumspection and the utmost precision, never going over the same ground twice, and never leaving any place unvisited."

This news was indeed alarming, and seemed to point to their immediate and certain discovery, for in what way were they to prevent it?

The spy further stated that he had had the greatest difficulty in eluding detection, and that once he had to lie concealed among some rocks to avoid being seen by the enemy, or he would have been back much earlier to inform them of the great danger in which they all stood.

The highwaymen could not help regarding this man with admiration. Unquestionably he had had the opportunity of betraying the young prince, and also the opportunity of making his own escape, a thing that now seemed impossible.

The effect of this news upon Prince Charles himself was really heart-breaking to witness.

Up to the present moment, thanks to the representations of our friends, he had still clung to the hope that he should at least escape from Scotland and rejoice his parents, if he did no more.

Now that hope was entirely reft from him.

While his foes continued as energetic as they appeared to be, he knew well enough that he had not the slightest chance.

The stupor of despair settled upon him and upon all.

What could save them?

Nothing.

Nothing but the adoption of some clever scheme by which their enemies could be hoodwinked.

But what stratagem was this?

None at all any one would think who considers how destitute they were of resources.

And yet we shall see how something was proposed that was exactly calculated to achieve the required aim.

The young highlander to whom we have lately so repeatedly made allusion stood forward, and, despite the opposition which some of his companions made, addressed Prince Charles.

CHAPTER CCVII.

THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER UNFOLDS HIS PLAN OF SELF-SACRIFICING DEVOTION TO PRINCE CHARLES.

THE YOUNG Pretender had assumed what recently had been a favourite attitude.

He had seated himself upon the red bench near the fire

placed his elbows upon his knees, and allowed his face to fall between his hands.

But when he heard the deep rough tones of the young highlander's voice, he raised his head and looked at him—not without surprise.

"My prince," he said, "you have heard, as I have, the report which our scout has to-day brought back to us; and, having done so, you must be well aware that to-morrow it will be no good to send out any one; by that time we shall have fallen into the hands of our enemies!"

"I am afraid it will be as you say. I have resigned myself to that, and so should you. When it comes to the last and the worst, we can only die like brave men, with our claymores in our grasp and our backs to the ground. For myself I will never surrender with life, but fight it out to the last!"

A murmur of admiration came from the lips of the highlanders as the prince gave utterance to this resolute and martial speech.

"I do not doubt your bravery, my prince," responded the young man; "but will you pardon me if I suggest a means by which you can throw your enemies off their guard, and so afford you an opportunity of making your escape?"

"If you can show me how to do that," said Charles Stuart, the fire of renewed hope kindling in his eyes, "I will not only pardon you, but you shall have my best thanks—and not only mine, but those of all here present."

"But, my prince," interposed the chief of the highlanders, "you know not the means of which he speaks, and when you are made acquainted with them, I am quite certain you will never consent to such a sacrifice."

"Heed him not, prince," said the young highlander. "Listen to me, I pray, and do not be offended with what I propose, nor deny my request out of any consideration for myself."

"That will depend," said the Pretender. "Speak, and let me hear. Speak freely, too, for there is nothing of which you need be afraid."

"You encourage me," was the reply, "and yet I don't know how to frame my speech or give utterance to my wishes. My prince, forgive me for my presumption, but have you noticed that in general outline there is some resemblance between you and me, sufficient to deceive any one who was not very intimately acquainted with you indeed?"

"I had not noticed the circumstance until you spoke, but now—and Charles Stuart looked closely at him as he spoke—"I wonder how it is that anything so obvious and conspicuous can have escaped my notice."

"It has been seen and remarked by others. Look closely at me, prince, and tell me whether you consider the resemblance sufficiently great to deceive any one who had not seen you many times."

"In the face, most certainly," replied Charles. "But," he added, in accents of the greatest astonishment and incredulity, "surely you do not for a moment dream of securing my safety by giving yourself up to my enemies—by personating myself!"

"Pardon my presumption, prince, I beg!"

"But was that your idea? Is it possible that you ever seriously entertained the idea of?"

"Not only is it possible, but true."

"Never!"

"My prince, surely you do not doubt me!"

"No; forgive me; I would never do that; and yet, at first, I found myself almost unable to believe in the existence of loyal devotion of so chivalric a character."

"You flatter me."

"Not I; no one could ever accuse me of that. But, come, I shall not think of granting your request of allowing such a sacrifice to be made; but gratify my curiosity by telling me the plan you had formed."

"Your wishes are law, my prince; but when I tell you, it will be in the hope of gaining more than your curiosity,—your approval likewise."

Charles Stuart shook his head, and made a movement with his hand for the young man to commence.

He obeyed at once.

"You must know that last night, my prince, it fell to my lot to be placed outside upon the summit of this rock, to watch for the appearance of our enemies, and give timely notice of their approach."

"In my long, weary watch, with no one near me—to

sound to break the awful stillness—no sight to see but the blue sky and stars, and the dusky outlines of the mountains—many strange and solemn thoughts occupied my mind.

"I thought, my prince, of you. I reviewed the whole of your present position, and saw how full of danger it was; and as I continued to gaze upon them, I became more and more impressed with the extreme difficulty you would have in avoiding them.

"Naturally enough, having reached this point, I pursued my thoughts still further, and having realized the full extent of the peril which impended over you, I began to cast about for some means by which it could be averted.

"For a long time, my prince, I endeavoured in vain to find a means that carried with it any appearance of feasibility of accomplishing so desirable an end. I was unable to see in what manner the vigilance of your enemies could be eluded.

"And then, not to weary you too much with a recital of my reflections, I thought that the only thing that could be done would be in some way to deceive your foes, and lull them into a feeling of false security.

"But, although conscious of the desirability of this, I could not concoct a scheme which would be calculated to effect it.

"At last, my prince, and I trust you will pardon me for the idea, the fact of the remarkable resemblance—in features, I mean—which exists between us pressed itself upon me."

"I had myself noticed it, and been surprised, and those who are with me have frequently spoken of it to me.

"Then I thought to myself, 'Suppose I was to make the proposition to the prince that I should personate him, and give myself up to the enemy.' Knowing you so slightly as they do, I feel sure that the deception would not be detected. When they had me prisoner under the impression that I was you, they would cease their rigorous search, and you would then have the best of all chances of reaching the sea-shore and making your way back again to France."

"I have heard you to the end without interrupting you," replied Charles Stuart; "not because I assented to what you said, but because I wished to hear all. Never did I dream that I should ever have so devoted a follower as your words prove you to be—never did I believe that such chivalrous devotion existed in these degenerate times."

The young highlander bowed deeply at these words of praise from the prince he was willing to serve so faithfully, and a flush of gratified colour mounted to his cheeks.

Charles Stuart, however, did not allow him to speak, but continued—

"You have not heard all, my friend—for such I should feel proud to call you—you have not heard all. Much as I may admire the loyal devotion which prompted the imagining of such a plan, and, however much I may desire the end which it is intended to achieve, I cannot for a moment think of accepting so great a sacrifice."

"Sacrifice, my prince!"

"Yes; do you not know the consequences of acting in the manner you proposed. If you gave yourself up to the Duke of Cumberland, and passed yourself off as being me, what do you think would be the result—whether or not detection should ensue."

"I know it, my prince."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!"

"It is death!"

"I am aware of that, my prince," said the young highlander, firmly; "but I have devoted myself to your service, and I am quite willing to lay down my life in it."

The Young Pretender, in the present extremity of his fortunes, was much overcome by the behaviour of this follower.

In the hour of his prosperity, much as he might have thought of such an act, had it been related to him, still it would not have made the impression which it now did while he was destitute of friends and hope.

But let us do him the justice to say that he never once thought of accepting the sacrifice so pleadingly proffered, though he was pleased to learn the extent of this young man's devotion.

"You are silent, my prince," he continued. "I trust you are reflecting upon the proposition I have made, and that in the end you will accept it."

"No, it is not that," replied the Pretender. "Never could I dream of accepting such a sacrifice."

"Why a sacrifice?"

"Shall you not sacrifice your life?"

"My life, prince?"

"Yes."

"What is it that I should not willingly give up for your service? That is no more than the duty of all who rank themselves under your banner, to acquiesce for you if they can—if not, to die."

"Say on," exclaimed the prince, "the more you say the greater becomes my admiration."

"Alas!"

"Why do you say alas?"

"I regret that you should listen to me, my prince, from such a motive. But still I will try to persuade you to adopt my scheme. Believe me, my prince, when I say I have thought long and earnestly on the subject, since it is an important one, not only to me, but to you, and all here present. You, as I do, must know full well that our ultimate capture and inevitable death is certain. It will, in all probability come upon us to-morrow, unless something is done to entirely change the current of events."

"I do not dispute that," replied Charles. "I expect to see them come. I have fully made up my mind to it. But we will meet them. We will each draw our swords, and fight to the last gasp, and if we fall, as doubtless we shall, it will not be until we have left our mark upon more than one of our foes. They shall slay us in fair fight if they can, but I will never gratify their malice by allowing myself to fall into their hands a prisoner, and as who are here, I feel certain, will defend me so long as a drop of blood remains in their veins."

CHAPTER CCIX.

THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER PERSISTS IN HIS DETERMINATION OF DYING TO SAVE HIS PRINCE.

THERE are certain times when a man can, by his voice, and animated actions, command the involuntary admiration of his fellows, and rouse their enthusiasm to its utmost pitch.

So it was with the Young Pretender on the present occasion.

His auditors were, without exception, men who looked up to personal bravery as being the most estimable quality a man could possess.

Therefore, they listened with kindling eyes to the heroic sentiments he expressed, and when he finished they were all dominated by the same feelings as he was.

The young highlander, however, who had showed himself so much attached to the cause of the Stuarts, waited until this sudden outbreak of excitement had passed away. Then he again spoke.

He commanded great and immediate attention.

"Prince," he said, "the words which you have spoken to me, and the manner in which you have listened to what I said, has had the effect of making me bold, and"—

"Do not apologize," said the Pretender; "you will please me best by speaking freely."

"And should I say that which will offend you, will you forgive me?"

"Freely."

"Then, prince, it is this. I do not wish for a moment to detract from your bravery, or those others present, but as you say, and truly, we shall all perish; now, let me ask you whether it would not be better for one to suffer in order that the others might escape?"

"And would you be that one?"

"I would, prince, with your permission."

"And in order that the others might be saved you are quite willing, young as you are, to quit life?"

"My life, as I have said, is devoted to your service, and to put you beyond the reach of your enemies I would sacrifice it with the utmost gladness."

"This surpasses all belief."

"Not so, prince; I have thought the matter deeply over, and I am sure that I could so arrange it that, though my life will pay the forfeit, yet your safety will be assured."

"How?" asked the Pretender; for it cannot be denied that he wished to save his life, but was reluctant to do so at the cost of another's. "How, my friend? tell me!"

"Thus!" said the young highlander; and as he spoke the word, he drew, with inconceivable rapidity, a poniard from its sheath.

It flashed for a moment in the air; and then, before any one could interpose, or even anticipate his design, he plunged it into his breast.

The prince started to his feet, and the ejaculation of horror which burst from his lips was echoed by the others, who, out of respect, had remained silent spectators of the scene.

"What have you done?" asked the prince. "What have you done?"

"My duty," replied the highlander; and as he spoke he drew the dagger from the wound, and threw it to a remote corner of the cavern.

The blood gushed in incredible quantities from the orifice.

Then he sank down upon one knee at the Pretender's feet.

"My dear prince!" he cried; "I die, in order that you may live, and my comrades escape. On the battle-field I was willing to risk my life for you, and shall I begrudge it now, when I know how great a gain you will be by my decease? Forgive me! par—!"

His strength was ebbing from him fast, and he was unable to complete the sentence; but, with the last effort of expiring nature, he caught the hand of Charles Stuart between both his, and pressed a fervent kiss upon it.

Then he relaxed his grasp, and would have fallen backwards on to the hard flooring of the cavern, had it not been for the support Dick Turpin's arm afforded—for the highwayman sprang forward in time to save him.

"Let me lie down!" gasped the young man, feebly.

"Let me lie down! I shall be better then. Let me lie down!"

Dick did not hesitate to comply with the request.

The wound, he felt certain, from the quantity of blood that had in so short a space of time effused from it, must be a mortal one.

Consequently it could matter little whether he remained in an upright or decumbent posture.

"The prince," said the young highlander, in a yet fainting tone of voice, "the prince!"

"I am here," replied Charles Stuart, and as he spoke he knelt down by the fast-dying youth, and took his hand.

"Forgive me, my dear prince," he said, "forgive me for my disobedience. Believe me, it is better that I alone should die than you should all perish. Do not shake your head. What I have done cannot now be undone, and do not let me die with the consciousness that I have so deeply offended you as to be unable to obtain your forgiveness."

"I forgive you freely," replied the Pretender, in a broken tone of voice, for naturally he was deeply touched by this great proof of devotion to his cause. "I forgive you freely."

"Then I shall die pangslessly. Are you sure, my prince, that I have your full pardon?"

"Quite; but yet do not think that I approve of your rash act, for to do that would be impossible."

The highlander sighed deeply.

"Well—well," he said, "I suppose I must remain content. But ere I die, listen to what I have to say. You will listen, will you not?"

"Certainly."

"Bend down closer, then, my prince, for to speak in so loud a tone as I have just done, exhausts me."

The Young Pretender, in obedience to the wish which his dependant expressed, bent his ear yet nearer to his lips.

"I have thought long and deeply upon what had best be done, my prince, and so I trust you will listen with what patience you can command, to what I am about to say. When the idea of personating your royal highness first found a place in my mind, I felt almost certain that you would never consent to it, but I determined, nevertheless, to carry out my intention."

"Rash youth."

The speaker did not heed this ejaculation, but continued—

"As we all know well, my prince, the orders of the savage and unscrupulous Duke of Cumberland to all his soldiers are that when you are discovered by any of them, they are not to attempt to spare your life, but slay you without mercy. That very order, cruel as it seems, my prince, will turn out to your advantage, and to his defeat."

"How so?" asked the Pretender, for he could not help feeling a deep interest in what was said.

"I will tell you. Great as may be the resemblance between us, so far as our faces and complexion are concerned, yet that resemblance extends not to our bodies. I have known harder service than you, and my body is more muscular; it may be that I am altogether stouter built. At any rate, if they saw my body, the cheat we wish to put upon them would be almost certain to be discovered. Do you not think so, my prince?"

"I do."

"I am certain of it; but our enemies play into our hands, and that which would be impossible becomes the easiest matter in the world."

"In what way? Explain yourself. I do not yet understand you."

"When I am dead—which will be in a few minutes now—I must request you to do something more, or I shall have died in vain. Surely that is not worth while! Promise me to accede to my request!"

"What is it?"

"Promise me!"

"I do. Speak!"

"It is this. As soon as I am dead, let some one draw his sword and sever my head from my body. Do not start and look so horrified! I shall not feel it. You have promised, and I rely upon you to keep your word. Do not delay me, for I feel that I am sinking fast, and I have yet much more to say."

"I am listening," said the prince, mournfully.

But the young highlander was almost exhausted.

By making a great effort, however, he rallied himself, and went on, though his voice now was little better than a hoarse whisper.

"Let some one sever my head from my shoulders. You understand me, do you not? That head, my poor head, will be worth thirty thousand pounds! My prince, that sum of money will be of the utmost service to you. Therefore, let some one upon whom you can depend carry my head to the Duke of Cumberland, declare it to be yours, and obtain the reward which is offered for it. I will defy them to detect the imposition, unless there should be someone there who is very intimately acquainted with you indeed."

The boldness of the plan which the young highlander thus unfolded, filled the prince and the highwaymen with admiration.

As for the highlanders, they stood looking on mournfully, for in the morning when, after his descent from the mountain, he had called them aside and one by one spoken to them, which circumstance it will be remembered had excited the suspicions of Dick Turpin, he had told them his scheme, and while some admired his bravery, all had endeavoured to dissuade him from it.

"Prince, prince," he cried, so feebly, that had not the cave and those within been profoundly silent, his voice would never have been heard; "do you comprehend my plan? Let my head be taken to the Duke of Cumberland, and passed off as yours! Let the reward be claimed. It is a large amount, and when it is obtained, let it be handed to you, to do with as you think fit. Thus will you be doubly revenged upon your enemies! You will be able to escape, and obtain the thirty thousand pounds as well. Can you hear what I say?"

"Quite plainly. But your voice shows me that your death is hastening on with rapid strides. Oh! for a priest to grant you absolution for the sin you have committed ere you die!"

"Do not think of that, my prince. To obtain a priest here is utterly impossible, but I shall die with the conviction on my mind that if ever any one was justified in committing self-destruction, I was, and that the motive will sanctify the deed. I am dying now, my prince. I feel myself growing cold, and things fade away from my view. Promise that I shall have my wishes carried out—promise that I shall not die in vain?"

"I promise!" said the prince.

"A smile lighted up the face of his devoted servitor, but either from a sudden pain, or from a remarkable fixity of purpose, he banished it, and assumed an expression of extreme anguish."

It might have been that, even in his last moments, he thought of still further imposing upon his foes, for, with the same look upon his features, he drew a gasping breath, a convulsive shudder overspread his body, and he expired.

CHAPTER CXX.

DICK TURPIN AND CLAUDE DUVAL CUT OFF THE HEAD OF THE YOUNG HIGHLANDER.

FOR several minutes after the young highlander thus drew his last breath, no one in the cavern either spoke or moved.

All were deeply impressed with the solemnity of what had just taken place, and that mysterious influence which the presence of a dead body never fails to produce, was shared in the full by all.

Prince Charles was the first to break the kind of spell by which their faculties were enchained.

He rose from the kneeling posture, which at the request of the now dead man, he had assumed.

The others, however, did not presume to move or speak, but waited with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity and interest to see what he would say or do next. They were not long kept in suspense.

Drawing back a few paces from the corpse, round which the highlanders and our friends had rather closely congregated, the young prince spoke.

Without exception, his words were listened to by every one with the most profound attention.

"My friends," he said, "it seems that you all perfectly comprehend, as I do, the motives which led this poor young man to commit the crime of self-destruction; and, such being the case, it will be unnecessary for me to say anything about them. As he very truly said, our situation is a most desperate one—so desperate, indeed, that it is questionable whether by any adverse combination of circumstances it could be worse. If we leave the shelter of this cavern we shall assuredly, in a few hours, be captured; if, on the other hand, we remain where we are, our discovery will be certain. We have two courses open to us, the termination of both of which is precisely the same."

A murmur of assent responded to his words.

"The matter is one which concerns you all equally, intimately, and individually; and therefore I shall leave you to decide what had better be done. In the first place, do you consider the plan proposed a feasible one, and, if so, shall I be justified in adopting it?"

The prince paused, and looking at the group of anxious faces by which he was surrounded, awaited a reply.

The rude highlanders, however, would never have dreamed of advising their prince. To them a Stuart was a being little inferior to a god, and anything he chose to say they would have looked upon as law.

But, with our friends the highwaymen, it was altogether different.

Each of them was accustomed to perilous emergencies and to taking the responsibility of action upon themselves.

Yet they felt that for them all to have spoken at once would have shown a want of respect, so they nudged Turpin to speak for them.

He knew what they meant, and obeyed them promptly.

"It appears to me, prince," said Turpin, in his rough and ready way, at which no one could take offence, "that such important business demands some amount of deliberation; and as we have but very little time, the sooner we come to a decision the better."

"Let me hear your candid opinion!" said the prince.

"In the hour of danger I have always found you a most trustworthy adviser, and in the present instance I shall be greatly guided by what you say."

"If you wish for my candid opinion, prince," replied Turpin, bowing in acknowledgment of the compliment which Charles Stuart had paid him, "I can give it to you in a very few words."

"Pray do so."

"Then I consider the plan a most excellent one. It

will require great boldness and address to put in execution, but I think all the better of it for that."

"And do you feel inclined to adopt it?"

"I do, most certainly; not, however, that I should ever have sanctioned or approved of the deed which this young man has committed; but as he is dead, and it is beyond the power of all of us to bring him back to life, I think we shall be greatly to blame if we scruple to make use of him to secure our own safety."

"And you think we should be justified in mutilating his remains?"

"It is not a very pleasant idea, I confess," replied Turpin, "but it strikes me that I would much rather mutilate his body than not, when I knew that by so doing I should not be injuring him in the least, but save my own life and the lives of my friends at the same time."

"That is enough. I own at first I felt some scruples whether I should keep the promise made him, but now you have quite removed them."

"The end to be gained will, I am sure, justify the means, and I for one should rejoice most heartily at the idea of your playing your foes such a trick as actually to receive the reward offered for your apprehension."

"Stop!" cried the prince; "that reminds me"—

"Of what?"

"Where is there any one to be found who will be willing, if we cut off this young man's head, to carry it to the Duke, and claim the reward?"

"I will—I will—I will!" cried every one, the highlanders included.

The prince smiled.

"Are you so ready to leave me?" he asked.

"Nay, it is not that," replied Turpin. "Had the service been to have remained by your side, and fight to the death, your appeal would have been as readily responded to."

"I believe it—I believe it!"

"But you see we are willing to do as you desire. It will remain with you to make election as to which one shall perform the mission."

"It will be one of extreme danger."

"Perhaps, prince; perhaps."

"If the fraud is discovered?"

"Why then I admit the bearer of the head would be in rather an unpleasant predicament! But, for my own part, I am sanguine of success if the one who goes performs his part well."

"Who shall I select?"

"That I shall leave entirely to you, my prince. I would speak, however, only I do not wish to shut myself out from the list of candidates."

"It shall go by the general voice," cried Charles.

"That will be the fairest and most satisfactory."

"It will. How shall we proceed? for, my prince, I have always found it advisable, whenever a particular course of action has been decided upon, to set about it at once."

"As you will. A show of hands shall decide it, and each candidate shall stand forward in succession."

"And you will decide who shall have the precedence?"

"I have no objection."

"It will be best."

"Then I decide upon you!"

"Me?"

"Even so. Stand forward."

Turpin, of course, complied.

"Now, my friends," continued the prince; "those who consider this the most proper person to depart upon the dangerous expedition, let them hold up their hands."

Scarcely had the words passed his lips than, as if by the exertion of one muscle, every hand was raised.

The decision was unanimous.

Dick Turpin looked round with a pleased smile upon his face.

He had all along coveted this task.

The inactive life which he had of late been leading made him long for such an enterprise as this no doubt would prove to be.

"Is this your decision?" cried the prince.

"It is."

"Enough, then. It will not be worth while for any other to stand forward, and if it will be any satisfaction to the electors and the elected, I can say that I heartily approve of the choice which has been made."

With an expression of countenance which one would think but ill accorded with what he was about to do, Dick Turpin drew his heavy sword from its sheath.

"It is a disagreeable task," he said, "but it is one that must be performed, and I am not the man to shrink from what is necessary."

He made a sign to Claude Duval, which was instantly understood.

He came to his side.

The others in the cave looked on with the greatest curiosity. There was not one who could have turned away.

The dead highlander lay out quite straight upon his back. Dick stooped over him, and with his left hand took hold of him by the clothing about his neck.

Then, with some slight exertion, he raised him to a sitting posture.

Claude Duval sank down behind him upon his hands and knees.

Then Dick gently let the body fall backwards, as it had a tendency to do.

It balanced, of course, over Claude's back.

The head hung back, leaving the neck fully exposed.

It was a fair mark.

Dick lifted his sword.

He caught hold of the mass' s hilt with both hands, in order that he might bring it down with greater force.

The steel weapon rose a sickening, swishing noise as it descended.

But such was the vigour with which it was brought down, and so accurate was the aim which Turpin had taken, that the head was severed at a single blow. It rolled several paces along the floor of the cavern.

Very little blood followed the stroke. It had nearly all drained out of the wound which the young man had inflicted upon himself.

Dick assisted Claude to rise from his awkward position.

"That is done," he said; "but there is yet more to do."

"What, oh! what?" asked the prince; "this sickens me."

"No doubt—no doubt. When I leave here, let a spy accompany me. By hovering about at a distance he will be able to learn whether the ruse is a successful one, and whether the troops that guard the mountain passes are withdrawn. If this is done, let me implore you not to lose a moment in quitting this place, and making the best of your way to the sea-shore, at the point most convenient for you. There you must find some opportunity of embarking and getting safely over to France, where you will be sure to find an asylum."

"Unless," said the prince, mournfully—"unless indeed they, in the hour of my extremity, should turn against me."

CHAPTER CXXI.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT UPON THE MOST PERILOUS ENTERPRISE HE HAS EVER UNDERTAKEN IN HIS LIFE.

"Do not anticipate misfortune, my prince," said Turpin, "it is bad enough without that."

"What?"

"Your position."

"I know that."

"If I succeed, you will have many difficulties to contend with in gaining the sea-shore. The fraud may not be suspected at first, and yet afterwards be detected, and a hot pursuit instituted after you."

"But have you reflected what you shall do in the event of discovery?"

"I have not—not shall I. I shall wait till the time comes. Leave me to shift for myself, and I shall be all right. It must be close upon sunrise now, and so it is time for me to start, but let me, before I take my departure, advise you what to do, in order that my proceedings may be all the more effectual."

"What is it you wish?"

"My friends here," said Turpin, indicating by a movement of his hand, Tom King, Jack Rann, and Claude Duval, "will remain with you, and will do their best to aid you in making your escape. They will also be hostages for me."

"Hostages?"

"Yes, my prince, I look forward, with great confidence

to obtaining the thirty thousand pounds, and should I do so you will want some security for my handing it over to you. As I said, escape to France. I will take the earliest opportunity of rejoining you there. If you do not see or hear anything of me, you may conclude that my mission has failed, and that I am no more."

"But you will take every precaution to insure your own safety?"

"Do not fear that, prince. I am not so tired of my life that I am desirous of flinging it away. I shall meet you in safety, I feel assured."

"I trust you will, indeed."

"And now listen, further. As quickly as possible, I shall take the head, and carry it direct to the Duke of Cumberland. I shall not adopt any particular disguise, for I do not believe I am known as one of your adherents. I shall invent on my journey a plausible tale to account for the head coming into my possession. On delivering it, however, the probability is that I shall be asked to lead them to the spot where the body is to be found."

"Ah! I did not think of that."

"But it is a thing likely to occur."

"Certain."

"I think so, too; therefore, some means must be taken to fix the deceit more deeply in their minds."

"But how?"

"My prince, I will tell you. These means will be rather disagreeable, but they cannot be avoided."

"What are they?"

"There are several things you carry about your person which will go a long way towards establishing your identity, such as your claymore, your dirk, your target, your sporran, and your curiously-worked belt. These you must transfer to the body of the man who died to save us."

The prince hesitated.

"It is inevitable, my prince, or I would not press it upon you. Your best course will be to exchange apparel, and, with your permission, I will proceed to strip those things off."

Turpin hardly waited long enough for the required assent to be given, but stooped down, and with great rapidity took off the different articles of clothing which the highlander had worn.

He carried them to the prince.

"They will furnish you," he said, "with that of which you so greatly stand in need."

"And what is that?"

"A disguise! Take the things as they are; retire to a corner of the cavern, and change them. We will then dress the corpse in those which you take off."

Dick, as he spoke, almost thrust the clothes into the prince's hands.

Repentant as it was to him, no doubt he clearly saw the necessity of doing as he had been advised; and as the old proverb says, "necessity knows no law," so he overcame his dislike as well as he could, and exchanged apparel.

The operation was one that did not occupy much time.

In a few minutes he returned to where the highwaymen stood.

Of course, during his absence they had taken the opportunity of speaking to each other, and making a few arrangements as to their future proceedings.

The difference which the simple change of habiliments made to the prince was really astonishing, and the highwaymen were more than ever struck with the great resemblance which existed between him and the highlander.

Dick was well pleased to perceive it, since it gave him all the better chance of success.

Without loss of time, he and his three comrades dressed the dead body in the clothes which the prince had just taken off.

The job was a very awkward one, but they succeeded in accomplishing it.

Then the resemblance was perfect.

The clothes fitted tightly, for the young man was larger made about the body than the prince was.

"Now," said Turpin, "I think we may look upon success as almost certain. I shall bring the Duke and those who like to come here to see the body. But, stay! I must make it appear as though there had been an encounter!"

Struck with the thought, Dick drew the claymore from

its sheath, and plentifully smeared it with blood, and laid it near the dead man's head.

Not content, however, with this, and wishing to make the deception as complete as possible, he drew his own sword, and plunged it several times into the inanimate clay.

No blood, of course, to speak of, flowed from these places, but he took care that there should be plenty placed there; for, owing to the manner in which the dagger had entered, the young man had bled to death.

These preparations were ghastly and horrible, but they may be excused on the ground of the absolute necessity there was for them.

At length all was ready.

Dick took up the head.

He held it by the hair.

The others who were present involuntarily turned their eyes from contemplating it to the prince, in order to compare the two.

Of course some differences could be detected, but they were very slight, and intimate as he was with the prince's features, Dick felt that had the head he held been shown to him, he would, without hesitation, have declared it to be that of Charles Stuart.

It was Claude Duval, however, who proposed, as a precautionary measure, to inflict a wound upon the face in such a manner, that while it did not mar the face, would yet make it more difficult of identification.

Dick approved of this entirely, and so accordingly as he held it, Claude drew his sword and inflicted a slight gash upon the face, extending from the mouth to the temple.

"Now I think all is finished. Look! the sun has already broken forth."

All turned as he spoke.

The entrance to the cavern faced the east, and a few beams of the rising sun penetrated a foot or two inside the entrance.

"It is time I took my departure. Farewell, my prince. You understand, I think, how you are to act. Nothing will elapse, I hope, before I learn the welcome intelligence that you have escaped. Then, as soon as may be, I will meet you in France, bringing with me, I hope, the thirty thousand pounds, though I shall consider effecting your escape the primary object, and the other a secondary one."

"Right," said the Pretender. "I can feel now how much I shall regret to part with you; but that time will have to come. I am reconciled now, however, by the hope that, though the enterprise you have taken in hand is one of a most dangerous character, you will escape all peril, and join me in a little while. Farewell! and may success attend your efforts."

The prince retired to a distant portion of the cavern for a double motive.

To conceal his own emotion.

And to allow Dick to take a farewell of his comrades, without the restraint which his presence would of necessity impose.

Dick found that bidding good-bye to an indefinite period to those three gallant hearts with whom he had shared so many perils, and from whom he hoped never to be separated, was anything but a pleasant business.

It had to be gone through, however, and he—

Screwed his courage to the sticking place.

It was necessary that he should do so, for he could not blind himself to the fact that the peril he was about to incur was one of no ordinary character; but Dick Turpin was never the man to flinch from danger, as the present occasion fully proved.

"Good-bye, old friends!" he said, in as cheerful a voice as he could assume. "Good-bye! We shall meet again, I hope, ere long; and then we will once more cry, 'Harrah for the road!' Do your best to procure the young prince's escape. Nothing on my part shall be wanting, rest assured of that; but I have every confidence in the success of the plan, which is one of the best I ever knew of."

"Take care of yourself, Dick!" said Tom King. "Do not run into any kind of needless danger!"

"I will not, Tom, rest assured of that. Farewell, friends! Let the spy be sent after me, and the moment he returns, evacuate this place, for I shall bring the duke here. That will be your best chance of escape. Farewell!"



[DICK TURPIN CLAIMS THE REWARD FOR THE PRETENDER'S HEAD.]

"Farewell," cried his comrades.

They shook hands all round.

But they were very loath to leave him, and followed him out on to the little plateau in front of the entrance to the cavern.

Holding the head in his hand in the same manner as he had first taken hold of it, he began the descent of the precipitous mountain path.

The highlander who was to watch his movements, and bring back a report of his proceedings, followed.

Then the prince came out on to the little plateau.

So, too, did the highlanders, whose numbers were now reduced to four.

The little party stood there and watched the receding form of the highwayman until the masses of rock at the base of the mountain hid him from their sight.

CHAPTER CCXII.

DICK TURPIN CARRIES THE YOUNG PRETENDER'S HEAD TO THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND, AND CLAIMS THE THIRTY THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.

MORE than once during his descent of the perilous mountain path, Dick Turpin turned back and waved his hand to his companions.

Those companions who it was questionable if he should ever see more.

But at length, when the bottom of the path was reached, and he turned round again, he found them no longer visible.

The immense masses of rock among which he had wound his way intercepted his view.

But the highlander who had followed him could still see at a distance.

And now, having gone so far, Dick began to very seriously consider as to which would be the best manner in which to act.

Accustomed as he was to trust to the chapter of accidents, and rely upon his own resources in the moment of danger, yet he felt that upon the present occasion, so pregnant with importance as it was, it would be better for him to depart from his ordinary method, and arrange beforehand some plan of action in his mind.

While thus deliberating, he found that the head, in the manner he carried it, was a serious inconvenience.

Besides which, should he meet any one, it would be the means of attracting more notice to himself than he wished.

And not only that, too, did it not represent a sum of thirty thousand pounds, and should he tell any one that it was the head of the Pretender he carried, would they not try to take it from him?

Assuredly so, and then not only would the chance he had of obtaining this large sum be lost, but also the escape of the young prince himself be jeopardized, if not made impossible.

These reflections showed him the necessity there was for him to conceal the nature of what he carried from every prying eye that might rest upon him, and he resolved to do so at once.

A fragment of rock—or rather what geologists would call a boulder—projected conveniently from the hard ground a few paces before him, and so he seated himself upon it.

The head he placed beside him.

He wanted something like a cloth in which to tie it up.

This he soon found.

In the days of which we write it was customary to wear round the neck a cravat of very voluminous dimensions.

They were made generally of white cambric, folded into four thicknesses.

They were worn once round the neck, and tied in a large bow, the ends of which were of preposterous length, and trimmed with lace, according to the wealth and position of the wearer.

This, then, Dick felt was not only what he could spare, but what would best answer his purpose; so he pulled it off and carefully enveloped the ghastly-looking head in its folds.

This done, he rose and resumed his journey.

The highlander who followed him, on perceiving him stop, stopped also, so that the same distance was maintained between the two.

From the spy who had returned with such a budget of alarming news, Dick had learned which path he ought to take, in order to reach his destination.

The way, however, was long and toilsome.

At the expiration of three hours from the time of his starting, and just when he was ready to drop with fatigue, he saw before him, in the distance, a small troop of English soldiers.

This nerved him to proceed at a still quicker pace—for, at first, he was unable to tell whether they were approaching or receding from him.

He found the former to be the case; and that if they continued in the same line of march, they must pass over the very spot upon which he stood.

Under such circumstances there could be no necessity for him to continue on his way; and so he determined to wait till they came up with him.

The highlander, who had also perceived the soldiers, and comprehended Dick's motive, halted, and hid himself from observation by lying down at full length on the top of a distant rock, and allowing no portion of his body, save the upper part of his head, to be visible.

Strains of martial music now began to make themselves heard.

Dick scarcely dared to hope that this, the first troop he came in sight of, was the one of which the Duke of Cumberland had taken the command, but he resolved upon no account to surrender the head, unless to that individual himself.

From these, however, he reasonably calculated that he should be able to ascertain his whereabouts.

It took the soldiers about a quarter of an hour to reach the spot where Turpin sat waiting for them.

When pretty near, however, he rose, and advanced to meet them.

In number they did not much exceed thirty, but they were all exceedingly well armed.

They were on foot.

Two, however, who rode, sometimes in the van, and

sometimes in the rear, attracted Dick's immediate attention.

He had never seen the Duke, for during the past few years he had been commanding the army on the continent, and he had only been sent for home to crush this formidable rebellion.

But more than once he had been described to him by those who had had frequent opportunities of observing his appearance, and the figure who sat on horseback entirely coincided with the description he had had of him.

Seeing Turpin approach, it would seem as though orders had been given to take him prisoner, for several hastened towards him.

But, with the rapidity of thought, Dick stripped off the covering that concealed the ghastly burden which he carried, and again grasping it by the hair, he held it aloft, as high as his arm would allow him, and shouted—

"The reward—the reward! I claim the reward! Thirty thousand pounds reward! I claim it, I say! Here is the head of the Young Pretender! Charles Stuart's head! Where is the duke? Lead me to the duke! I claim the reward!"

These vociferations caused, as might be supposed, the utmost surprise and excitement among the soldiery, and something of their import seemed to reach the ears of the personage on horseback, whom Dick took to be the Duke of Cumberland, for he spurred his horse forward as he said—

"Vat is this? Vat you say? Donder and blitzen! Zay zat one time more! Zirty zousand pounds! Mein Gott! Did you say it was ze Pretender's head?"

His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland always spoke execrable English, but especially so if anything excited him.

"My lord duke," replied Turpin, as he stood near the duke's horse, and holding up the head in his right hand, and pointing to it with his left, "my lord duke, I said this was the head of Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, and so it is, and I claim the reward of thirty thousand pounds!"

"Donder and blitzen!" cried the duke, doubt, astonishment, and triumph alternately appearing upon his face. "Hold ze head up, and let me have von look at him."

He turned half-round in the saddle as he spoke, and Turpin held the head in such a manner that he could perceive the features.

The duke looked long and keenly.

"Mein Gott!" he cried, at length, "zat'a him, for sure, though he looks fatter as when I saw him last. Where did you find him?"

"With the permission of your royal highness," replied Turpin, "I will relate to you the whole of the particulars."

"Goot! Is zat his head?"

"Your royal highness, I know your character too well to be foolish enough to attempt to impose upon you in any way."

The duke smiled.

He was not insensible to flattery.

He liked to be thought sagacious and cunning.

But that may be easily accounted for.

It was because he was neither the one nor the other.

But then he, in common with most others, like to be flattered for that which they do not possess.

He looked with an eye of favour upon Dick already.

The highwayman saw his advantage, and, of course, did not fail to profit by it.

"It would be an insult to your royal highness to attempt to deceive you in any way, and, not only that, it would be sure to fail. Look, your royal highness. Look upon this face, and tell me whether there is any doubt about it."

"Certainly not. As you say, zat is ze traitor's face."

Upon hearing this decided expression of opinion upon the part of their chief, the soldiers gave three cheers.

But the subordinate officers who attended the troop pressed forward to examine the head.

They looked, too, very curiously at Turpin, but he assumed an air of the most perfect self-possession, though, for all he knew, one or more of those who crowded round him were acquainted with his person.

The exultation of the duke was great—so great, indeed, that he would have overlooked all details had not the officers reminded him.

Not one, however, entertained the least doubt of it being the Young Pretender's head, and the idea of a man being

temerarious enough to pass some one else's off for it, never occurred to them at all.

They were exceedingly jealous, though, of Turpin.

Each one entertained the hope of being the lucky man, and now they were disappointed, though the probability is they would not have so much cared had the reward been claimed by one of their comrades.

But the duke now turned to the highwayman, and said—

"Vat you say may be quite true, but you vill have to give us de proof."

Turpin bowed.

"I am ready, your royal highness."

"Donder and blitzen, then you shall make von begin."

CHAPTER CCXIII.

THE YOUNG PRINCE AND HIS FOLLOWERS COMMENCE THEIR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY TO LOCHNANUAGH.

FROM his lofty post of observation, the spy who had followed Dick saw all that had taken place.

It was rather premature, but he considered the whole affair now settled.

The troop they had so much reason to dread was there.

He could not tell, of course, how soon they would, under the direction of Dick Turpin, set out for the cavern.

He, therefore, considered himself justified in jumping to the conclusion that all was well, and so, with great care and stealth, he had crept down from the rock, and, by a circuitous route, made his way to the little mountain path leading up to the cavern.

Upon arriving at its commencement, he paused and looked back, in order to make sure that his foes were not close behind him.

To his great relief, there was no one at all in sight.

To say that this man did not feel the full peril of the situation in which he was placed, and that he was not anxious to get safely out of it in the best manner he possibly could, would not be true.

For his own part, however, he would never have dreamed of betraying his prince, although he might have gained so much if he had.

Nor would he have consented to the sacrifice of his companion's life if he could have in any way prevented it; but as the sacrifice had taken place, he thought it would be best to take all the advantage of it that he possibly could.

Satisfied that the coast was quite clear, he commenced the steep ascent of the mountain path.

By this time it was nearly noon, and the sun was at his greatest altitude.

The mists which usually hung about the mountain had been dispersed, and having passed the rocks at the bottom, he looked up to that place where the little plateau was situated.

An eye less keen than his, and less familiar with the spot, would fail to have detected anything upon it, but he could tell even at that distance that his friends were there watching and waiting for his return.

Up, up he went steadily and slowly, for he found climbing was a severe strain upon his already much-taxed strength.

But when he reached his destination, he was literally overwhelmed with questions respecting the manner in which Turpin had got on.

The reader is already in possession of more facts than the spy could give, and so it will be needless to repeat the imperfect information which he imparted.

They, however, like him, looked upon the affair as already settled—as though the result was already achieved. But how great was their mistake.

We will not, however, anticipate the course of events, but, leaving Dick Turpin for a little while in the enemy's camp, proceed to relate what steps were taken by his companions.

Hope had once more revived in the breast of the young prince. Not that he thought he should ever accomplish that which had been the dream of his own and his father's life, but he had the hope that he should escape from his enemies.

Moreover, he was stimulated by the hope which Turpin had held out of getting possession of the thirty thousand pounds.

This sum, large as it was, would not indemnify him for the loss of the crown of England, nor was it with that idea that he wished it.

It was chiefly because it would gratify a certain feeling of revenge which he very naturally felt.

Added to which, it would provide him with the means of recompensing those who had so bravely stood by him in his direst extremity.

He would, in fine, be able to give them as much as they would have obtained had they betrayed him and handed him over to his foes.

But should Turpin fail, they would have to rest satisfied with thanks, for he would have no more substantial payment to offer them, the unfortunate enterprise which he had undertaken having left him impecunious.

A great thing he felt, however, it would be to leave the shores of Scotland, taking the men with him, and thus saving their lives.

He listened, therefore, with the utmost intentness to every word which the spy uttered.

As soon as he had finished he spoke.

"My friends," he said, "you have all heard the news. All of you, too, heard the instructions which our absent friend gave us. They were that we should immediately evacuate the cave, for he would not be able to tell how soon he should return with the troops after he had fallen in with them."

"Exactly so," replied Tom King; "and, therefore, my prince, let us bid this place good bye, without delay. I have great faith in Dick's strategic abilities, and so would you have, were I to relate a few anecdotes about him. He will impose on them successfully, beyond doubt, and, relying upon our carrying out the instructions he was so careful to particularly give us, he will lead the soldiers to the cave."

"And so, the sooner we are out of it, the better," replied the prince.

"Unquestionably," said Tom King, "and so it only remains for you to decide what we shall do, and then we will make a start."

"I am anxious that we should all keep together," answered the prince, "for in the present case I fully believe union to be strength. Lochnanuagh will be the nearest point where we can meet with our friends, and where we have a reasonable prospect of getting a boat. I propose, then, that we make that our destination. Do you agree with me there, my friends?"

A general murmur of assent came from the lips of those whom he addressed.

"That is sufficient. The next thing is, we shall require a guide, for I am not familiar enough with the country to find my way there. Let the one, therefore, who knows the road best stand forward, and we will make him our guide."

Neither of the three highwaymen were better qualified to take this post than the prince was himself, so it rested entirely with the five highlanders.

They spent some minutes in earnest conversation with each other.

There seemed to be some slight difference of opinion.

But as they spoke in their own outlandish guttural language, and in a low tone, the others could not tell its import.

The dispute, if any there was, was soon decided.

Perhaps this was in some measure due to the presence of the prince.

One highlander stood forward.

He was one to whom particular allusion has more than once been made.

He was the oldest, and the one that seemed to have some degree of command over the others.

He was a stalwart, sturdy Scot—a perfect type of his hardy race, and though his hair and his beard were of a grizzly gray, and his countenance interlaced with countless wrinkles, yet he was as strong and firm as many a one who had not attained to half his age.

The attitude in which he stood before the young prince was one of profound respect.

He did not speak, but waited for him to address him first.

"Speak freely," said the Pretender; "do you feel yourself qualified to guide us to the spot I mentioned?"

"My prince," replied the old highlander, "I am an old man now, and all my life I have lived about this spot,

and am as familiar with the road to the place you want to reach as I am with the pathway which you can see winding down to the base of the mountain."

"We will trust you, then," said Charles Stuart. "But if you know two roads, and one of those two is less frequented than the other, let us take that one."

"Enough, my prince! I can lead you the whole distance along a pathway inaccessible to horse, and where it is a thousand chances to one if we meet any one."

"Then let it be decided that we take that route; so now, my friends, forward, and I fervently hope not only that our brave comrade may bring his undertaking to a successful issue, but that we shall be so fortunate as to reach the shores of France, where I make little doubt we shall meet with a hospitable reception. At any rate, they will not treat us as our foes would."

"My prince," said the old highlander, respectfully, who had been intrusted with the duty of guide.

"Say on, old friend."

"If I might advise, I would have the order of march agreed upon before we start."

"You are right; it ought to be decided. Speak; let us hear how you think it should be done. I shall defer entirely to you, believing that you have the best idea of the difficulties we should meet with."

The highlander's face assumed an expression of the utmost gratification as the words fell upon his ears.

He drew himself up even more proudly than before.

"I think it will be best, my prince," he replied, "for one of my companions to go before us, in order to ascertain that the path is free from all dangers and obstructions."

"Certainly."

"And that another should bring up the rear, whose duty it will be to apprise us of the approach of the enemy."

"A better mode of procedure could not be devised," said the prince, "and let it be fully acted upon. The news that I am no more will quickly spread from place to place, and the vigilance of the troops who have been set to guard the various mountain paths will be abated."

"Let us trust so," said Claude Duval.

"Forward, then!" cried the prince; "it is high time now that we left this place."

"We shall have to cross the mountain," said the guide, "do not descend it. The path will be rough and difficult, but each man must do his best."

He then gave some instructions to one of his companions, who set out first.

The others then followed.

The guide and the young prince.

The three highwaymen.

The highlanders.

And then one was left behind to bring up the rear in the manner he had arranged.

CHAPTER CCXIV.

PICKLE FORTUNE SEEMS AT LAST TO SMILE UPON THE FORLORN ENTERPRISE OF YOUNG CHARLES STUART. In this way, then, they began their long and toilsome journey.

The path was narrow, and in some places almost perpendicular.

Its course was upward and round the mountain.

They gained the highest portion, and then they were compelled by sheer fatigue to halt.

Naturally they looked back upon the route they had just come.

The prospect was full of grandeur.

As they gazed around, the breasts of the principal characters were animated with very different emotions.

The old highlander, as he stood up and looked at the magnificent scenery below him, felt a glow of the warmest admiration at his heart—he was proud of his native land.

But the young prince felt his heart swell almost to bursting, when, on looking round, he contemplated that which he considered by right belonged to him, and yet saw himself a disguised fugitive, with his life in the most imminent danger.

The three highwaymen, although impressed by the beauty and sublimity of what they saw, looked keenly upon the plain, in order to detect, if possible, some trace of their foes.

Claude shaded his eyes with his hands, and looked long and earnestly.

Suddenly an exclamation broke from his lips.

At the same moment he pointed with his finger in a particular direction.

"Look," he cried, "look there, all of you, and tell me whether those tiny specks are not soldiers."

In an instant every eye was turned upon the spot he indicated.

A cluster of specks, looking like a number of small red insects, could just be seen.

To distinguish them required a steadfast gaze and a clear eye.

Most particularly did the old highlander fix his looks upon them.

Our readers must have noticed how well aged people, when in possession of health and strength, can perceive distant objects.

In this respect they have the advantage of youth.

The reason is obvious.

As age increases, the pupil of the eye becomes flattened.

This produces a twofold effect.

One is, that objects near at hand, such as the letters in a book, cannot be seen unless held at a considerable distance from the eye.

The other is, that objects afar off, such as the figures upon the face of a distant church clock, or a balloon in the air, can be seen by them when invisible to younger persons.

And this was the case with the highlander.

Claude Duval was what is familiarly termed "long-sighted," and that is the reason he was the first to see the moving specks below.

But the guide, when he fixed his glance upon them, was able to make them out distinctly.

They were soldiers.

"I can see them," he said, "quite plainly. They are on foot, and are making their way towards the path leading to the cavern."

"Are you sure?" asked Charles Stuart.

"Quite, my prince," was the reply. "We must put ourselves again in motion. Fortunately, a few steps will take us round the side of the mountain. If we stay here we shall run the greatest risk of being seen."

"Lead on, then," cried the prince. "Do not delay a single moment. If they saw us, they would try all they could to capture us, although they might not suspect who we really were."

"Very true, my prince."

Once more, after their brief and insufficient halt, the little troop put themselves in motion.

But now their path trended downwards, which made a vast difference.

At first, they made all the speed they possibly could, but, as soon as they were quite out of sight of the soldiers, they slackened their pace, and proceeded at a more easy rate.

To measure in a straight line from where they were to the plain beneath was no great distance, but they could not, of course, reach it in this fashion.

The path wound round and round in the most tortuous manner conceivable, and, by the time they were near the base, it was quite dusk.

By the advice of the guide, they halted at a spot where stood an old ruined hut, doubtless erected by some poor shepherd.

It was now quite deserted.

The whole of the little party, save two, entered it, and these were left outside as sentinels.

Had they deemed it prudent they would have lighted a fire, not only for the sake of the agreeable warmth, but also for the light it would have afforded them, but they were obliged to forego this comfort.

Here they broke their fast with such rude food as they had each brought with them, and, throwing themselves at full length upon the floor, sought that rest which nature imperiously demanded.

Here they stayed for nearly four hours.

Night had then fully come.

The slender crescent of a new moon shed a faint and subdued light upon the surrounding country.

All was still—oppressively so, in fact.

That this was as good a time to recommence their march as they could possibly have was beyond doubt.

But before they fairly started, by the advice of Tom King and his comrade, one of the highlanders was sent out to reconnoitre.

He was absent nearly half-an-hour.

When he came back, he brought with him some rather alarming intelligence.

Some distance further down the path a party of soldiers were stationed.

As soon as the guide heard this, he said, at once—

"We must stay where we are. It is our only chance of safety. To pass them while they remain there will be impossible."

"Are you sure of this?" asked the young prince.

"Quite sure."

"Then we must trust to our scheme having the effect of removing them. When they hear of my fictitious death they will withdraw, for what other motive can they have for keeping watch?"

"None, my prince."

"Then we must stay, and wait till they remove."

At this moment the clear notes of a bugle rang out shrilly upon the night air.

The sound came from a distance.

It was immediately responded to by one close at hand.

Our friends did not dare to move or speak.

They bent all their faculties to that of listening.

Another note was blown, and then another, as though for the purpose of enabling the two parties to wait.

Had either of the three highwaymen been familiar with the nature of the ground, they would have crept forward to reconnoitre, but being in total ignorance of it, they considered it would be too hazardous.

The same idea seemed to strike the old highlander, although no word was spoken.

Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he glided away like a spectre.

He was quickly out of sight in the darkness.

He was out of hearing sooner, for he had slipped off his shoes and stockings, and walked barefoot.

A very anxious time elapsed while he was absent.

All listened eagerly for his return.

The sounds of the bugles had ceased, leaving them as much in the dark as to their meaning as they were before.

Five minutes passed.

Still there was no sign of the old man.

Just, however, as their impatience had risen to such an unbearable extent that they were about to rise and seek him, he returned.

The young prince and his followers stood together in a dense throng at the door of the ruined hut.

"All is well!" said the highlander, in a deep voice, which was deeply tinged with satisfaction; "All is well!"

"How so?"

"I will tell you, my prince. When I left your side I made my way with all possible silence down the path to where the troop of soldiers were picketed."

"And did you discover the meaning of the notes upon the bugles?"

"I did, as you shall hear. Taking advantage of those times when the clear, shrill notes made the ear deaf to all other sounds, I crept nearer and nearer, until at length I was able not only to distinguish their forms, but also to hear what was said."

"Go on."

"It seemed to me, my prince, that the bugle was blown by the soldiers below, in order to direct some one to the exact place where they were."

"Presently I heard a heavy footstep, a challenge, and a rejoinder."

"I listened with the utmost intentness."

"The new comer was a soldier, and he brought the others the intelligence that they might break up their watch, as the Young Pretender had been already captured."

"I lay quite still, and soon, to my great joy, the whole party of soldiers, who were twenty in number at the very least, retreated, leaving the pathway free."

"Is it possible?"

"Fortune at last favours you, my prince. Let us lose no time in taking advantage of this fortunate circumstance."

"The ruse seen. Have we succeeded, then?" said Charles Stuart.

"Yes; may he who has successfully carried it out fall into no great danger in consequence."

It was Tom King who uttered these words.

The deep and solemn tones of his voice left no doubt behind as to their earnestness.

"Most fervently," said Prince Charles, "do I re-echo your wish; and let me also add that we may be fortunate enough to pursue the rest of our journey without molestation."

CHAPTER CCXY.

AN UNEXPECTED SPECTACLE PASSES BEFORE THE EYES OF THE FUGITIVES.

THE stirring episode in the lives of the four highwaymen, in which Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, played so prominent a part, is fast approaching a termination; and as in a little while we shall have to busy ourselves with relating the adventures of Dick Turpin in the English camp, we think it will be best, in order that there may be no future interruption, to follow the young prince and those he had with him in their dangerous journey to Lochnanagh.

The withdrawal of the small band of troops, who had been set to guard the mountain pass at such a critical moment, seemed almost like a special interposition of Providence in their behalf.

At all events, the young prince thought so, and even if his followers did not, it seemed to re-animate them with fresh hopes, and they drew from the event the most favourable auguries.

The advice of the old highlander, who had brought this, the only welcome intelligence they had for so long received, was too good not to be immediately acted upon.

Accordingly, preserving the same order of march as heretofore, they recommenced their journey.

Morning was now, however, very close at hand, and so it became necessary for them to proceed with the utmost circumspection.

Indeed, so far as actual safety went, it would undoubtedly have been best for them to halt by day and travel by night; but they did not adopt this mode of progression, because they feared that the deception might ere long be detected, and so their escape from Scotland be for ever prevented.

Their main object was not to lose time, but to reach the coast as quickly as possible.

They relied much upon the knowledge of the country to be traversed which the old man possessed.

Every step they took served to confirm the words that he had uttered—namely, that every step of the road was perfectly familiar to him.

He still continued to express his belief that there was scarcely any probability of their encountering either friends or enemies, so little used, on account of its difficulty, was the path by which he proposed to take them.

On reaching the base of the mountain, a wild-looking glen or ravine was reached, on the other side of which they could just distinguish the outlines of another chain of mountains, whose summits were just a shade darker than the sky they seemed to pierce, save in those places where they were crowned with snow.

A terrible rushing, roaring noise, as of some turbulent mountain torrent assailed their ears, and as they still continued their progress across the ravine, the sound grew louder and louder, until at last the very ground beneath their feet trembled perceptibly, so impetuous was its course.

The din was terrific, and it is only those who have witnessed such a phenomenon who can form a just idea of what it is like.

All such will say that it is utterly out of the power of language to express it.

With great difficulty the old highlander made his voice heard.

"Take care all," he cried. "A narrow bridge, that will allow of the passage of but one man at a time, is the only means by which this mountain torrent can be crossed. Follow me, my prince. I will lead the way."

He walked forward as he spoke.

The others followed him anxiously.

A little more than a dozen paces brought them to the verge of the deep abyss, through some contracted channel in which the water forced its way.

The place in which they now stood was in the profoundest darkness, and had not their eyes grown thoroughly accustomed to it, they would never have been able to perceive the end of the bridge over which they had been told they would have to pass.

As it was, however, they could just distinguish the wooden railing intended for a support for the hand.

Boldly and fearlessly, however, the old highlander, after giving a word or two of advice to his beloved prince as to how he should proceed, advanced, and commenced the perilous passage.

The bridge, as he had called it, was nothing more than the trunk of a huge tree, which had been laid from one brink of the abyss to the other.

The upper surface, however, originally round, had been rudely chopped with an axe, until there was a flat place to walk upon, and a hand-rail had been formed by driving two posts in at each end of the tree, and fastening a long piece of wood of convenient thickness to them.

The young prince followed in the steps of his faithful and aged servitor.

More than once, as he thought of his perilous situation, and the awful depth of the abyss, his brain reeled, and it was only by clenching the railing with additional firmness, that he saved himself from falling.

But difficult and full of peril as the undertaking seemed, the torrent was safely crossed by all, without the occurrence of any accident whatever.

This done, they still continued their progress, relying wholly upon the old man who walked before them with the utmost confidence.

And now they again commenced the ascent of a mountain, but all were inspired to put up with the fatigue by the reflection that each step they took served to bring them that much nearer to safety.

Day dawned, and found them about half-way up a mountain, superior in every respect to that in which the cavern was situated.

Some alarm was generated in the breasts of all by the idea that they might be seen by some one from the plains below; but the old man promptly allayed them by the assurance that there was really nothing of the kind to fear.

The mountain path presented every appearance of being but little used. In fact, few had the courage to attempt to cross the mountains, and incur the risk of falling down some tremendous precipice.

They preferred rather making a detour by taking the broad and well-beaten road which wound round the base of the mountain.

But such a road as that would have been ill-suited to the fugitives, whose main object was to elude observation.

At present, so far as they could tell, they had not encountered a human being.

Fatigue compelled them to rest for awhile soon after sunrise.

Here they broke their fast with such rude food as they had been able to carry with them.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack both had an expression upon their faces which very plainly said they had had enough of it.

It will be remembered that all along they had felt rather unwilling, and it was only not to be separated from their comrades that they made a sacrifice and came.

Tom King was anxious for the fate of Turpin. The more he thought upon it the fuller of peril did the enterprise which he undertaken seem to be.

For the young prince, too, he felt the greatest possible solicitude.

But, with that constancy of purpose which formed so prominent a trait in his disposition, Tom determined to hold by him to the last—that is to say, until he had seen him in a place of perfect safety.

They stayed no longer than nature compelled them, and again set forward upon their journey.

The old highlander, however, gave them the welcome assurance that the distance they now had to go was comparatively short, and that, by pushing forward vigorously, they would probably reach it by nightfall.

This infused a little fresh energy into their exhausted frames.

Soon after this, too, the descent of the mountain was begun.

At the foot their guide told them they would have to

exercise the greatest caution, because there they would have to cross the broad high-road, which during the day was much frequented by passengers of all kinds.

Owing to the very peculiar manner in which the path wound among the rocks, they were able, by stooping, to descend without exposing themselves to the gaze of any one upon it.

But now they reached a part where it would be no longer possible to do this.

They stopped.

It would be necessary to watch for an opportunity of crossing the road when it was free from travellers.

One of the men, after a little while, was sent forward to reconnoitre.

Scarcely, however, had he departed than the loud and spirit-stirring strains of martial music burst upon their ears.

But it was not Scotch music.

It was the brass-band belonging to some English regiment that sent forth the cheerful sounds.

Not daring to move, they crouched still closer down behind the rock where they had concealed themselves.

The tramp—tramp of the soldiers could now be heard.

From this they could tell they were in large numbers, and marching steadily along a well-kept road.

At this moment the spy returned.

Alarm was in his looks.

"The Southrons," he said. "They come! Their numbers are countless! They are marching along the road!"

"Have they learned our whereabouts, think you?" asked Charles Stuart.

"That, my prince, I cannot tell, but they are coming in this direction."

"This is serious," said Tom King. "But with your permission, I will make a suggestion."

"Say on, my friend. I have every confidence in your judgment."

Tom bowed, as he replied

"It may be that this bodes no special harm to us. Let yonder fragment of stone be rolled against this, and I will stand upon it. By so doing I shall command a view of the road, and as only the upper part of my face will be exposed, there will be no fear of my being seen."

"As you will," said the prince; "but pray be careful not to betray our hiding-place."

"Fear nothing," said Tom. "My own safety would make me take measures not to do that, without counting yours and my companions."

As he spoke, Tom mounted upon the piece of stone which he had mentioned, and cautiously peered over the edge of the rock.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

THE PRINCE AND HIS FOLLOWERS REACH LOCHNAWACH, AND ARE WRECKED UPON THE ROCKY COAST OF BARRA.

To his great satisfaction he found he could obtain an excellent view of the high-road.

It was many feet below him, and he considered the danger he was in of being seen by any one upon it was so slight as to amount to no danger at all.

In the distance he could perceive a large moving mass, the top of which was a forest of bayonets.

He watched its onward course with great attention.

It soon became obvious to him that they would have to pass just beneath him, or else mount the path, and discover them where they stood.

But when he came to consider, he felt that from the latter he had very little indeed to dread.

The circumstance of their passing along the road just at that time, amounted, he considered, to a coincidence, and nothing more.

Seeing that some time must of necessity elapse before the troops actually passed by, he descended, and requested the young prince to take his place and look.

The same was done by all of them, and then Tom resumed his old post of observation.

The foremost of the soldiers had now got a little beyond the rock behind which he stood, and up the road, as far as ever his eye could carry him, he saw them there in countless numbers.

What it meant he was rather at a loss to guess.

He turned round to the guide.

"You saw the soldiers," he said; "tell me, does the road they are taking lead them to England or to Scotland?"

"To England," was the reply.

"Good!"

Tom was looking out again.

He had intended at first to count the different companies, but he had found the effort beyond him.

His patience, and that of his companions grew exhausted.

Still there seemed to be no end of the troops.

There must have been several thousands of them at least.

They walked, too, as many abreast as the road would allow.

At last came some on horseback.

But these were comparatively few in number.

Then the officers.

The idea that had occurred to Tom when he asked the question of the guide, seemed confirmed.

The English troops, satisfied of the death of the person they had been sent to capture, were returning to the lowlands.

And now Tom could see the end.

With the greatest eagerness and impatience he looked forward, narrowly scanning the countenances of all who passed.

Presently he saw that for which he had been looking.

Surrounded by a guard, but without weapons of any kind—looking, indeed, very much like a prisoner of war—was Dick Turpin!

Yes, there could be no mistake, Tom could have told his familiar form from a thousand others.

He fancied Dick looked rather grave.

He noted one fact, however, with surprise.

Turpin was mounted on Black Bess!

It was as impossible for Tom to mistake the mare any more than her master.

After Dick and his guard came the Duke of Cumberland, surrounded by his staff, whose brilliant uniforms, despite the hard service they had seen, looked beautiful in the sunlight.

This was a sight that so absorbed Tom King, that he almost forgot his companions.

But at the last moment he did think of them.

They looked up again, as on the former occasion.

Sixteen-String Jack was the last, and when he came down again they had passed out of sight.

A vast crowd of people followed, as usual.

Not a word was said about Dick, for the old guide spoke.

"My prince," he said, "this is indeed a most fortunate circumstance for us. When the last stragglers have gone you may depend the road will be clear, for some little time at least. That is the opportunity we must take of crossing it. If we wait for ever we shall never have a better."

All present could not fail to be struck with the truth of this, and so not another moment was lost in speaking, but they crept cautiously down the path.

When they came fully into sight of the high-road, it was quite deserted.

Descending, then, the remainder of the path as quickly as they could, they, after looking both right and left, crossed it, and gained the shelter of a dense forest which was on the opposite side.

All drew a long breath of relief.

Then the prince spoke—

"Let us continue to push forward with what speed we may, for who can tell the meaning of this sudden movement of the troops, or estimate the danger it may bring upon us if we delay."

"My prince," replied Tom King, "I think you have now no cause for fear. The meaning of what we have seen is, I take it, clear enough. The whole troops under the command of the sanguinary duke have been withdrawn from the mountains, and, under the belief that you are no more, are repairing with your head to London."

"Do you really think so?"

"I feel almost certain of it, therefore, I say, push on with all speed. The chance of our meeting with our foes is now almost at an end."

"But," said Claude Duval, "what do you make of Dick being a prisoner?"

"Ah! there I am as much abroad as yourself. I can only account for it in one way,"

"And how is that?"

"That he is made a sort of honourable prisoner, in token of his good faith."

"Then, if that is the case, he is in a very ticklish position indeed."

"I fear he is, but if any one can get out of such a difficulty, Turpin can."

"I quite believe that, Tom."

"Most fervently," interrupted the prince, "do I hope that all will go well with him, and that he will lose neither life nor liberty through me."

"I know he has your good wishes, my prince," replied Tom King, "and he must even be content to abide by his own luck."

"I am puzzled," said Sixteen-String Jack, "to account for his having possession of his mare. You all of you know that it was left at Sir Kenneth Grant's, and that is a long way from here."

"We must wait," said Claude, "until we see him, and then he will have doubtless much to tell us, and many mysteries to elucidate."

In such-like talk and speculations respecting their absent comrade, they whiled away the time upon their long and weary march.

But as Tom had said, they met with no further molestations, though they did not upon that account abate the caution which they had all along observed.

Contrary to the opinion of the guide, it was nearer day-break than nightfall when they reached Lochnanuagh—at which place they arrived thoroughly wearied out.

But the information respecting the Camerons and Macdonalds being found there was perfectly correct.

The interview between the young prince and Cameron of Lochiel, was a most affecting one. The gentle chief, in common with nearly every one, had heard of his death, and that the English were taking his head to London; for short as was the time, the startling nature of the intelligence had caused it to spread with extraordinary rapidity.

During the whole of the first day the prince and his followers were accommodated with rest and refreshment at a rude cabin, the temporary residence of Lochiel.

The latter started off without delay to find a vessel which would transport his prince to France; but for a long time his influence, great as it was, was powerless to obtain one.

He knew, however, the absolute necessity there was for instantaneous action, and that the deceit which had been put upon the duke might at any moment be discovered, and so he did not relax his efforts to obtain what he sought.

It was nearly dusk, and he was standing near the seashore with his object unachieved, when he saw a small boat come in sight.

He waited until its keel grated upon the strand, and then he spoke to the inmate.

From him he learned that a French sloop-of-war was anchored off the coast of South Uist—an island contiguous to the Isle of Skye.

The idea of reaching this sloop at once occurred to Lochiel; and after some trouble, he succeeded in engaging the man to row them to the spot where he had seen the vessel.

Midnight was the time decided upon for them to set out.

The night was dark and gloomy.

The highlanders who had been so faithful to the unfortunate young prince, could not be induced upon any consideration to leave their native land.

So the three highwaymen were all he had to accompany him, and they as steadfastly refused to leave him.

They found, however, when they took their seats that it would have been inconvenient to have loaded the boat more.

A last farewell was exchanged by the prince with Lochiel and the other chiefs, who, like their clansmen, would not suffer themselves to be persuaded to leave Scotland.

The boat was pushed off.

At first the boatman took both oars, out, after a little time, the highwaymen alternately relieved him of one of them.

But, as they shot through the waters, darker and darker it grew, and the wind began to moan and sigh like a giant in great pain.

Fain would the boatman, as he glanced up at the threatening sky and heard the tokens of a coming storm, have turned back to the shore, but our friends would not listen to it: such a course would have been more dangerous to them than going on.

And now the waves began to swell, and on their tips appeared a thick white foam, which glistened around them wherever they turned their gaze.

Still on they went.

The storm rose to its full height.

The boat was tossed about like a feather.

All control of it was lost.

Suddenly, however, a tremendous crash made itself heard above the din of the tempest.

The boat had struck against a rock and gone to pieces.

CHAPTER CCXVII.

THE DUKE OF CUMBERLAND REACHES THE CAVE AND SATISFIES ALL HIS DOUBTS, BUT THE HEADLESS BODY IS BURIED ON THE PLATEAU.

"DONDER and blitzes, den you shall make von begin." Such was the elegant manner in which the Duke of Cumberland requested Dick Turpin to give him an account of how the head came into his possession.

Concealing the smile which rose to his lips as he heard these uncouth words by bowing deeply, Dick said—

"Your royal highness, it will take some time to relate the whole history to you, and, therefore, if you will permit me, I will defer it to another and more convenient opportunity."

"Nein! nein! Mine Gott! Nein! You shall make von begin at von now!"

"Your royal highness's wishes are my commands," replied Turpin. "I was fearful of tiring your patience."

"Nein! Go on!"

"My name," said Turpin, assuming a manner which he judged would make him thought well of by the soldiery, "is John Palmer, and by those who know me well I am called Jack Palmer, and nothing more. I come from Essex, and when I heard of the rebellion and the reward our good king offered for the prince of the Jacobites, for so I call him, I thought I would come to Scotland and try my luck. Well, a very hard time I have had of it since. I have been climbing over mountains and such like, but I met with no success. I was just thinking about coming back and giving it up, when, as I came down a road, I saw a narrow path leading up the side of the mountain. I don't know hardly what made me go up, only it was a sort of forlorn hope you see. Well, after a while, I found that this path brought me out on to a square piece of rock almost like a large table, and before me I saw what looked like the entrance to a cavern; and, fearing nothing, I entered.

"It was very dark inside, except just by the mouth, and I was going to turn away again, when I heard a groan. 'Hullo!' I thought, 'what's that?' but I hadn't much time to wonder, for some one crawled out of the dark part of the cave into the light.

"I looked at him, and saw he was dressed in a Scotch dress, but I did not know who he was.

"But he spoke to me, and implored me to save his life; he said he was dying with cold and hunger, and that he had got separated from his companions and had been wandering about the mountains ever since, until he had laid down in the cavern to die.

"I asked him who he was, your royal highness, and then, after a great deal of hesitation, he confessed that he was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, for so he called himself, and begged of me not to betray him.

"There was my thirty thousand pounds, I thought; so I drew my sword and made a lunge at him.

"I wounded him slightly, but, faint and worn out as he was, he drew his own sword and attacked me with the desperation of a mad man.

"Of course you saw the end now. I conquered him, cut off his head, and here it is, and I claim my thirty thousand pounds reward."

"Good," said the duke, who had listened with pleasure to this barbarous tale. "Vera good indeed."

No sooner did he give utterance to this speech, than the soldiers set up a unanimous cheer.

When the sound had died away, one of the inferior

officers addressed a few words in German to the duke, who gave a nod for a reply, and said—

"Vera good, mein frient. It is all vera good. But can you take us to the cave where his body may be found?"

"Certainly," replied Turpin, with the greatest readiness. "It is a long way from here, but I can lead you there direct."

"Good, then make von start."

The order to march was given, and then the whole party made their way to the mountain path.

While coming, Dick Turpin had taken the greatest possible notice of his route, so he was able to lead the duke without hesitation to it.

But he did not hurry, for fear his friends should not have had time to leave the place and get fairly out of sight.

For if even a glimpse were to be caught of them it would spoil all, and when in the distance he could perceive the mountain, he did not dare to turn his eyes up to it for fear he should see them, and that those accompanying him should follow the direction of his eyes and see them also.

And, in truth, had he looked up and his eyes been keen enough, he would have seen his comrades where they had taken the first halt, and from which place Claude Duval had detected the soldiery moving across the plain.

Fortunately, however, for all those in whose good fortune we feel an interest, the little plateau before the cavern was reached without a glimpse being caught of them.

The duke had been obliged to dismount at the foot of the mountain and ascend it on foot like the rest, for by nature dukes are no more respected than any other people.

No time was lost in crossing the little open space and penetrating the cavern, for all were filled with curiosity to see the remains of the young prince.

When there was no fire, the interior of the cavern was rather dark—too dark for any objects to be seen with proper plainness.

Turning round, Dick requested a light, but none of those present had the means of obtaining one.

It was then proposed that the body should be dragged outside into the daylight.

The outlines of the still, stark form could just be distinguished from the floor of the cave, and that was all.

But it was sufficient to enable two of the soldiers to catch hold of it by the feet.

In this ignominious manner, then, the body was dragged out into the plateau.

Headless and besmeared with blood as it was, it presented a most ghastly and horrible appearance, such as would make any heart quail to look upon.

But it had the effect intended.

Whatever doubt might have lingered about the hearts of the duke, his officers, or his men, it was completely dissipated when they saw it.

There could be no mistaking the dress.

It was the same as he had been described as wearing.

Then there was the belt, with its curious workmanship, which was well known to belong to, and be highly prized by, the unfortunate prince, since he had received it at the hands of one very dear to him indeed.

His target, also, as the shield was called, and his sporran, or leather pouch, worn in front of the kilt, all went to place the question of his identity beyond dispute.

A close examination was made of the headless body, and Dick, who wished to quite satisfy them, again unwrapped the head, and placed it on the neck from which it had been taken.

All could see, then, that it had been cut from that, and no other.

The features, too, now that they had quite stiffened in death, and partially disfigured as they were, bore so remarkable a resemblance to those of Charles Stuart as to absolutely startle even Turpin himself.

His heart beat high with hope.

Hitherto the bold and daring scheme had succeeded in a manner that he never could have hoped for.

The duke and every one were perfectly satisfied.

And now Turpin had the other and more difficult portion of the plan to carry out, and that was to obtain the thirty thousand pounds.

This the Duke of Cumberland, in his uncouth manner, was pleased to express his opinion he had fully earned,



[DICK TURPIN RESUMES HIS OLD VOCATION AS KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.]

but, before he could actually receive it, he would have to accompany him to London without delay, and place the head before the king.

This Turpin would, of course, gladly enough have backed out of, but he could not see a means of doing so, and, besides, he thought for so great an end he could afford to incur a little danger.

Having been absent from the road for so long a time, he thought he might almost be forgotten.

At any rate, he should run the risk.

When all had quite satisfied themselves by looking upon the blood-stained corpse, Dick ventured to propose that he should be buried there and then upon the spot.

For some time the sanguinary duke refused to listen to any such suggestion.

His brutal nature would have been better satisfied had they mutilated, in some horrible way, the inanimate remains.

But, in the end, he was prevailed upon to pay this last tribute of respect.

None had spades or shovels wherewith to dig, but Turpin set the example by drawing his sword, and with it turning up the hard rocky earth.

A dozen were ordered to assist him, and, though the progress each individually made was small, yet together it quickly mounted up.

At the expiration of about a quarter of an hour, therefore, a tolerable sized hole had been scooped out of the rock.

It was rather shallow, however, and not very regular in shape.

But it was better than no grave at all.

With very little ceremony the body of the young Highlander, who had so bravely died in order that the others might be saved, was thrown into the hole.

Then they began filling in the dirt.

This was an operation that was quickly performed, and the whole was packed in as hard as possible by the men stamping upon it with their feet.

At last the unhallowed funeral was finished, and Dick,

again carefully wrapping up the head, followed the duke and his troop from the melancholy spot.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MANNER IN WHICH DICK TURPIN REGAINED POSSESSION OF HIS MARE, BLACK BESS.

It was easy to gather from the manner of the duke that he considered his enterprise in the highlands was quite achieved.

He was the victor, and felt elated accordingly.

It will not be hard to believe that he cordially hated all members of the house of Stuart.

He rejoiced, therefore, at having, as he thought, seen the last of the race.

Gladly would he have had all of them exterminated, for he felt that while any of them lived, the members of his family held the English throne by a very uncertain tenure.

He gave orders, therefore, as soon as his troop was again in marching order, to withdraw all the soldiers who had been set to guard the different mountain passes, there being no longer a necessity for their being posted there.

The main body of the army was at Fort Augustus, a considerable distance further north, and it was to this place that, after some deliberation, he made his way.

He would then and there have set out for England, only he felt he could not justly and consistently do so.

Therefore, with an unwilling heart, he took the road to Fort Augustus.

He made all speed there, however, and immediately upon arriving, sent out messengers to the different troops commanding them to return.

Considering the manner in which they were scattered about the country, they reunited in a very short space of time.

It was early one fine morning that the army commenced its return march.

The hearts of all beat high with satisfaction and delight, but no one experienced such a joy as the duke himself did.

He was crafty enough, however, to keep a sharp eye upon Turpin.

Without actually saying as much, he contrived to make him a kind of military prisoner.

Dick Turpin, with the duke and his staff, stood together on the morning when the army began their march, in such a manner that the whole of the troops passed by them.

It was a pleasing and invigorating sight.

In the contemplation of it Dick almost forgot the peril of his situation.

There was something like pride visible in the glance which the commander-in-chief bent upon his soldiers, as, accompanied by bands of martial music, they all marched by.

The greater part was composed of foot-soldiers.

Then came the cavalry.

Suddenly, however, as these were passing by, Dick uttered an exclamation of the most unbounded surprise.

It was so loud as actually to amount to a shout.

The duke turned round.

An angry look was on his face, for he did not know from whose lips the cry had come.

But when he saw it was Turpin, that expression softened a little.

"Your royal highness," cried Dick, "hear me. Call to the men to halt. Do so, I beseech you, it is something of the utmost importance."

The duke muttered something in which the word "donder" could be distinguished, and gave the required command.

It was obeyed with that promptitude upon which generals so much pride themselves.

The progress of the whole was stayed.

Then the duke, in common with all the rest, turned an inquiring look upon Turpin, to know the reason of his sudden ejaculation, and the motive for making the extraordinary request he had.

Respectfully, he advanced towards the duke.

"Your royal highness will, I hope, pardon me when I tell you why I asked you to bring the troops to a halt, but as the cavalry were passing by I saw one man mounted on a black mare which I would swear belongs to me."

Such was the case.

Dick's quick eye had detected from among the horses which the soldiers rode, the familiar form of his own bonny mare, Black Bess.

At first he could hardly believe his own eyes.

He fully believed she was in perfect security in the charge of Sir Kenneth Grant.

And yet here she was before him.

There could be no possible doubt upon the subject. He knew the look of her too well, had seen her too often, to fall into any kind of mistake upon the subject.

And so he called out in the manner we have recorded.

"A horse!" cried the duke. "Donder and blitzen, do you stop the troop for a horse?"

"Excuse me," cried Turpin, and then he paused.

He hardly knew what to say about his mare, or where he had left her.

It would not do to relate just the facts of the case, that was quite clear.

Nor would it do to hesitate.

But Dick was used to doing things upon the spur of the moment, and concocting a tale upon an emergency, and though on this occasion, as we have said, he hesitated, yet it was so slightly as scarcely to be noticed.

"Excuse me, your royal highness, but I have no doubt of what I say. One of your men is riding upon a black mare which belongs to me, and by whom I set great store."

"Donder and blitzen" —

"One moment more, your royal highness," said Turpin. "I would rather a thousand times surrender the large amount which you acknowledge that I have gained by slaying the Young Pretender than I would part with her."

"But, mein Gott! how did von soldier have von horse of yours?"

"That I cannot tell, your royal highness, but she is mine! She was stolen from me! I don't say that the man who rides her committed the crime, but she has been stolen from me, and I appeal to you as a just and upright man to demand her restoration to me!"

"It is von trifling thing vot for to stop de march! How can you prove your words? Donder and blitzen, how can you prove dem?"

"Easily, your royal highness," replied Turpin, "if you will only allow me the opportunity."

"The troops is come to von stop! Be quick!"

"I will—I will prove it to you, because she will know me."

"Von horse know you?"

"Even so, your royal highness."

"Mein Gott, dat is good—vera good! Let us see von horse know his master."

"Command the whole regiment before us to dismount, your royal highness, and loose their bridles, and the thing is done."

Filled with surprise, and no small degree of curiosity either, the German duke gave the command to his men.

The regiment, of which Dick spoke, was a troop of horse soldiers.

In number they were about three hundred.

The one who rode Black Bess had, during the colloquy between the duke and the highwayman, got a considerable distance in advance.

A slight bustle and confusion of course ensued upon the obeyal of this command, but it soon subsided.

Every soldier and every horse stood immovable.

"Now, your royal highness," said Dick Turpin, and as he spoke his eyes sparkled with joy and pride, "if I call my mare, and she comes to my side out of all that number, shall you consider it a sufficient proof that she really belongs to me?"

"It will be von vera vunderful zing," said the duke.

"Shall you consider it a proof?"

"Donder and blitzen, yes! I should like to zee ze horse or ze mare zat could do it!"

"Then you shall at once, your royal highness, for upon giving the signal, she will make her way to my side in a moment."

From where Turpin stood it was quite impossible for him to see Black Bess, so, of course, it follows that Black Bess could not see him.

But Dick was not afraid of the test he was going to

apply, long as was the time he had been separated from his gallant steed.

She had heard and obeyed the sound too often when he was engaged in some perilous highway exploit to forget it now.

Not only the duke, but all those who had heard what had taken place, looked forward to see what would be the result.

All were silent.

Then Dick Turpin turned his face towards the soldiers, so that the signal should be heard with proper plainness.

He looked not, however, particularly in the direction in which he knew Black Bess to be, but straight before him.

Then he gave utterance to a strange chirping sound, such as might be heard at night in a lonely wood, as one nocturnal bird gave a signal to another.

The sound was loud and shrill.

Before, however, its notes had fairly died away, a sudden commotion could be perceived in advance.

But whatever might be the cause, it was quickly over.

With a sudden dash, a horse leaped out into the open space before the soldiers.

It stood there a second, as though in doubt.

Turpin repeated the sound.

It was echoed by a joyful neigh, and the next instant his gallant mare, Black Bess, was at his side.

She rubbed her head gently against his shoulder.

The recognition was complete.

A feeling of the utmost joy filled Dick's breast.

His bonny steed was once more with him in perfect safety.

More than half the peril of his situation seemed to pass away now, and patting her encouragingly upon the neck, he took the bridle in his hand, and led her to where the Duke of Cumberland was standing.

CHAPTER CCXIX.

THE GOVERNOR OF EDINBURGH CASTLE SEEMS TO HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE HEAD, AND PROPOSES A MEANS OF SETTING THEM AT REST.

"Your royal highness," said Dick, respectfully, raising his hat as he spoke, "are you satisfied that this horse belongs to me, and to no other?"

"Mein Gott! Yah! It is von vera wonderful circumstance. Dunder and blitzen! it is more dan von can believe!"

And this last opinion was one that seemed to be shared in by most of those present—that is, if their looks of astonishment could be taken as any guide to their feelings.

When Dick had first taught Black Bess to obey a call from him, in the same manner that a dog would, he had done so under the conviction that it would be of the greatest utility, but he never dreamed it would be so important as it had proved.

It established his right to her beyond all doubt, a thing which might have been otherwise exceedingly difficult to do.

It should be here stated that a considerable degree of jealousy towards Turpin existed among the officers forming the duke's staff, and they lay slip no opportunity of suggesting things to the commander-in-chief which he would never have thought of.

On the present occasion one of them whispered something to the duke which was immediately responded to by a nod.

The officer, then, who was mounted on a beautiful horse, rose forward, and cried out—

"Where is the soldier who rode upon this black horse? Let him stand forward."

In obedience to this command, a soldier stepped out of the ranks, and was led by the officer in front of the duke, who, however, Turpin noticed was getting rather impatient at the delay.

The reader, like Dick, of course anticipates the question about to be asked.

It was how Black Bess had come to be in the soldier's possession.

A great deal would depend upon his answer.

At a sign from the duke, the officer propounded the queries.

"Is that the steed you have been riding upon?"

"It is, sir."

"How long have you had it?"

"It's a mare, sir."

"Never mind that, I ask how long have you had it?"

"Just before the battle of Culloden."

"How just before the battle, didn't you bring it from England?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"The one I had first was shot under me at the beginning of the campaign."

"Well?"

"And this was one that was taken by forced levy."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite, sir."

"From what place was it taken?"

"From the house of Sir Kenneth Grant."

"Sir Kenneth Grant?"

"Yes, sir; if you will remember, some doubts were entertained of his loyalty, and so, to prove it, he allowed what was wanted to be taken."

"And you took this horse from his stables?"

"I did, sir."

"That is enough, then."

"May I venture to hope, your royal highness, that you are quite satisfied now that you find it is as I said. Sir Kenneth Grant is a friend of our family, and I left my horse in his stable."

"It is von enough," said the duke.

"Many thanks," replied Turpin; "and I hope you will accept my apologies for having delayed you so long."

"Mein Gott! yes. Forward!"

The order was given to resume the march.

Turpin, with as light a heart as any man in Scotland, despite the imminence of his danger, mounted once more his bonny mare, Black Bess.

He had been full of anxiety to know how he should gain possession of her, when, lo! she was, by a series of apparently adverse circumstances, placed in his hands.

The officers, however, took good care to keep close guard around him.

Many were suspicious.

And so, as the army was marching southward, it happened that Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack caught sight of Dick Turpin, escorted like a prisoner, and mounted on bonny Black Bess.

It will now be understood how it was that the prince and his followers reached Lochnanuagh without meeting with any difficulty.

The Duke of Cumberland was quite firmly impressed with the idea that he had seen the end of the Young Pretender, and who can wonder at his holding such a belief?

The consequence was that he no longer troubled himself to keep guard or to send out parties.

He was desirous of reaching London with as little delay as possible.

Already he fancied he felt upon his brows the laurel wreath which would be awarded to him for the prompt manner in which he had crushed this rebellion, which had at one time threatened to completely overthrow the existing government.

With little of interest to relate to the reader, the army reached the city of Edinburgh.

The whole distance had been performed by means of forced marches, and when they reached the ancient city, a rest became imperative for both man and beast.

They found that the account of what had taken place had already preceded them, and the streets were consequently thronged with the inhabitants when they arrived.

To gratify these, the duke caused the head to be set up on a tall pike, and carried in such a manner that it might be seen by all.

The greatest curiosity was manifested respecting it.

The principal portion of the army took up their quarters in the ancient castle, and it was to this place that Turpin was drafted.

The governor of the castle received the duke and his staff, and, as a token of respect, was allowed to inspect the head.

Some days having now elapsed since it was cut from the body a considerable alteration had taken place in its looks.

The governor, however—who had seen the young prince himself upon the occasion of the rebel army taking possession of Edinburgh—when he looked at it, shook his head with a puzzled air.

Turpin, who was present, noticed the circumstance, misgivingly.

But let the governor's suspicions have been what they might, he did not give utterance to them.

Dick was rendered all the more uneasy by this occurrence.

He felt he was now treading upon very dangerous ground.

Yet his heart did not fail him in the least, and, having carried out the enterprise so far successfully, encouraged him to go on.

Besides, the least attempt to draw back would have the effect of bringing danger upon him.

He resolved to stand his ground.

A repeat for the officers was laid in one of the largest apartments in the castle, at which Dick and the governor sat down.

As a matter of course, after the meal was over, the conversation turned upon the Young Pretender.

But Turpin noticed that the governor managed to bring up the subject.

What motive had he in doing this?

Dick knew not, but he maintained his composure.

The story of the manner in which the young prince's head had been brought before their notice was told over again.

"It has just occurred to me," said the governor of the castle, after listening attentively to all that had been said, and having come to the conclusion that he had heard the whole of the facts. "It has just occurred to me that there is an easy way to settle all doubts."

"Doubts!" said Turpin, rather fiercely, "who dares insinuate?"

"No one, my good sir," replied the governor with provoking calmness. "I do not wish to insinuate anything."

"Then, sir, just allow me to ask what you mean by doubts?"

"I can easily do so, if you will give me the opportunity."

Turpin bowed, as though he wished for the explanation to be given at once.

No one, to have looked in his face, could have read the feelings of his heart.

"When I said doubts," began the governor, "perhaps I was not altogether right in using the word. In fact, I admit I was not. The fact is, although the story is rather extraordinary, it seems to be amply substantiated by facts. Now, you admit to solve doubts, you led the duke to the cavern where the body was to be found. Did you not?"

"I certainly did," replied Turpin, "and what they saw there fully bore out what I said."

"Just so."

"Well, then?"

"It was evidence proving the fact, was it not?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Now, in my opinion, any further evidence as to the identity of the head ought to be satisfactory to all parties, and especially so to you, for it would still further establish your right to the reward."

"I am well aware of that, and so far from objecting to have any confirmatory evidence brought forward, I shall only be too glad, for the very reasons you have named."

The governor looked at him keenly.

"But," continued Turpin, "when you spoke of doubts, I naturally took exception to the expression."

"Oh! just so. You see it is all right."

"You have quite satisfied me. For my own part, I must admit that the whole affair is singular enough."

"I think it remarkably so. Poor young man! I feel sorry for him. His wild ambitious dream is over now."

"And with it, I fear, all hopes of the Stuart family holding the sceptre of this country or England," said Turpin.

"Donder and blitzen! I say yah to zat. Verra good. But, mein Gott, governor, what was it you did say about do more of von proof? Let us hear vat zat might be at so vooce."

CHAPTER CCXX.

A PRISONER IS BROUGHT UP FROM THE DUNGEONS OF THE CASTLE TO IDENTIFY THE HEAD.

It was the Duke of Cumberland who spoke.

There was no mistaking the voice, and the utterance was now rendered more than ever unintelligible by the wine he had drunk.

He had been a silent, but not unobservant, listener to the conversation between Dick Turpin and the governor.

He at once took hold of the idea of gaining some additional testimony.

It was only natural that he should.

And when a notion once took root in his mind, the obstinacy of his disposition would for ever preclude all hopes of removing it.

An acute observer of human nature, Dick had been able to come to a correct conclusion as to the duke's character, and this speech of his added greatly to his uneasiness.

What kind of test was going to be applied to the spurious head he could not think.

Of course, he dreaded the inquiry, for reasons well known to the reader.

He was powerless to act.

He was like a rudderless ship, borne onwards by some irresistible current.

It might have been fancy, but Dick thought he could detect upon the governor's face a look of malicious satisfaction.

Could it be possible that he knew who he was?

Could it be possible that he, by some inexplicable means, divined the cheat which he had kept up so long?

He could not tell.

He shut his teeth to maintain his calmness, while the governor replied to the duke's question.

"Your royal highness, I am pleased to find that you think this so important a matter, and that you wish to know the means of placing the identity of the head beyond all doubt. It happens that I am in a position to do this."

"Mein Gott! Go on."

"You must know, then, your royal highness, that I have at this moment a prisoner in the dungeons beneath the castle, the personal attendant or valet of the Young Pretender."

"Valet?" thought Dick, and then in a moment he remembered who he was.

He had disappeared at the early portion of the rebellion, and was, as he thought, slain.

But, by the governor's words, it would seem that he lived.

"With the permission of your grace," continued the governor, "I will have this man removed from his place of confinement, and brought hither."

"Yah—yah."

"When, without knowing the reason for which he is sent, the head shall be placed before him, and, as the condition of his liberty, he shall swear whether it is the head of his late master, the Young Pretender, or not."

"Mein Gott! Yes, let it be done. Donder and blitzen! As you say, Meinheer Governor, we shall know zen for shure."

The governor bowed, and, summoning an attendant, gave orders for the valet to be removed from his dungeon, and brought there without delay.

But little was said after the man had left.

All were anxious and excited.

Dick found himself the cynosure of all eyes.

He had trouble enough to maintain his composure without this addition.

But, by a rare command of the facial muscles, he withstood the scrutiny, seeming in no way interested—as though he felt quite assured of the result.

Such, however, was very far indeed from being the state of his mind.

Upon the next few moments depended everything.

The prince and his friends, he hoped, were by this time completely out of danger, and yet circumstances might have arisen to make their quitting Scotland impossible.

He had no means of telling.

Should the man who was about to be presented declare

the head not to be his master's, Dick felt his position would be truly desperate.

Perhaps hopeless would be a better word.

Could he by any means communicate with this man, and let him know the secret, all would be well.

To save his prince he would swear the head was his.

But unforwarned—without the least idea of what had taken place—and offered so powerful an inducement for speaking the truth, what was to be expected?

The worst, unquestionably.

Intimately knowing the prince, as he would, from the fact of his being his personal attendant, and having filled the situation of valet, he would be able to pronounce with certainty that it was not the head of the young prince.

What was to be done?

Nothing.

Dick felt it was so, and, therefore, with the best grace he could, resigned himself to the current of events.

Luck had hitherto befriended him in many a perilous situation, and he could only hope that it would do so now.

He had one consolation under his difficulties, though it was so slight a one as to be scarcely deserving of the name.

Should the head pass this ordeal triumphantly, he might laugh at everything else, save positive proof that the Pretender was yet alive.

Only a few minutes actually elapsed from the time the attendant left the room until he returned, but it seemed an age.

He brought word that the prisoner would arrive in a moment.

The door through which he would come now became the centre of attraction, to which all eyes were turned.

No one spoke.

Presently, however, there was heard outside the door, in the stone corridor, the tramp of martial footsteps.

A voice cried, "halt."

Then the door was thrown open, and the prisoner marched into the apartment.

In obedience to a sign from the governor, the little troops which had escorted him separated, and allowed a view of the prisoner to be obtained.

He was an ordinary-looking man, with nothing special either in his face or figure to require description.

He had that unmistakable appearance about him, however, which always enables any one to distinguish a servant from a gentleman.

He looked around surprised, for he had not been informed for what reason he had been summoned.

Oh! how fervently Dick wished that he could communicate invisibly with him, but he feared to gaze at him even, lest the action should be taken notice of.

Events must take their course.

The bold highwayman felt his heart beat at an unusual rate.

"Your royal highness," said the governor, "shall I interrogate this man?"

"Yah! make you begin."

The governor turned to the prisoner.

"What is your name?" he asked.

The man hesitated a moment, and then replied—

"David Morrison."

"Good! And what was your last occupation?"

"That of valet."

"To whom?"

"To Prince Charles Stuart."

"There is no such prince! However, listen to me, and remember that your life depends upon the answers you give!"

No reply came from the prisoner's lips.

The governor continued—

"If you were valet to this young man, it follows that you must be intimately acquainted with his personal appearance. Is it so?"

"I—I know him," said the valet, stammeringly.

"Enough. Should you be able to recognise him?"

"Why—why do you ask?"

"Reply to my question," said the governor, sternly, "and never mind the reasons. Should you be able to recognise Charles Stuart?"

"From a thousand!"

"That is sufficient, then; you shall be put to the test. Speak truly, and you shall be immediately set at liberty. I promise this in the name of the commander-in-chief."

The man's eyes brightened at the prospect of quitting his prison with life.

"Where is the young prince?" he asked; "has he fallen a captive into your hands?"

This speech was quite conclusive.

He clearly had not heard the intelligence that the Young Pretender was supposed to be no more.

Dick's heart sank.

He felt certain that this man would immediately be able to detect the deception.

It was impossible for him to do otherwise.

In his joy he would be sure to declare it was not his master's head, and rejoice that he was yet alive.

He could never tell, Dick thought, that he would be rendering his prince an essential service by declaring that to be his head when he knew it was not.

Turpin's agitation increased.

By the order of the governor, the ghastly head had been sent for.

It was brought in wrapped up in cloths.

This was done in such a manner that no one could have guessed what it was.

The valet looked on curiously and inquiringly.

Not long, however, was his state of suspense allowed to continue.

One by one the cloths that enveloped it were removed.

Then the terrible-looking object was disclosed.

A shout of horror came from Morrison's lips.

He evidently recognised the head.

With no little satisfaction, Turpin noted this.

His hopes, too, revived when he perceived another circumstance.

From a variety of causes, such as its transit from place to place, in which it had received several contusions, and the partial progress of decay which had already begun to make its loathsome presence apparent, it had lost that sharpness of outline which it had formerly had, and consequently, those finer features, which would have enabled one to identify it, were no longer visible.

CHAPTER CXXII.

DICK FEARS THAT, AFTER ALL, THE SPURIOUS HEAD WILL BRING HIM MORE TROUBLE THAN PROFIT.

WHEN Morrison uttered the cry, he would have sprung forward to make a closer examination of what, at the first glance, he had taken to be the head of young Charles Stuart, but the firm grasp of his captors held him back.

The governor spoke—

"Release him," he said, "and allow him to come forward. Now, examine the head, and tell us, on your life, whether it is the head of the Young Pretender."

This was said to Morrison, who, as soon as he was released, had sprung forward.

The head was on one corner of the table at which the duke and his officers were sitting.

As soon as he got near, the valet looked for a moment, fixedly, at the horrible countenance.

Then he sank down upon his knees before it, and covered his face with his hands.

Dick grew more hopeful still, but yet he dreaded a discovery being made.

Preserving the same unruffled demeanour, however, as he had hitherto done, he bent all his attention to the kneeling servant.

"Speak," said the governor, "and tell me whether this is the head of your young master."

The valet removed his hands.

His cheeks were wet with tears.

"It is he, poor young man," he said, in a broken voice.

"Alas! that I should ever have lived to see this day. Alas! that such should have been his untimely fate. He was a good master to me. I shall never have such another."

He recovered his face, and rebowed his head.

The Duke of Cumberland uttered a sigh of relief, and his usual exclamation—

"Mein Gott!"

The valet surely was deceived.

But the governor, unwilling to believe that his suspicions were unfounded, was very loath to quit the subject.

"Rise," he said, "and be a man. Look again at the head, and repeat your assurance that it is your master's." In obedience to this command, Morrison stood up.

He looked in the governor's face with surprise, and then turned to the duke and his companions.

He could not understand why they wished him to be so particular.

Their doubts communicated themselves to him.

Perhaps, after all, he thought, his beloved master was not dead.

Perhaps this was the head of some one resembling him.

His face became animated with the hope that his master might after all be alive.

Now was the danger.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him.

Tremblingly he approached the head, and put back the hair from the forehead near the right temple.

He started, and a half-suppressed cry came from his lips.

To Dick it was perfectly intelligible.

He closed his teeth, and drew in his breath.

The valet, doubtless, had suddenly recollected some mark by which he could tell for certain whether it was the prince's head.

Dick knew the mark for which he looked.

He had once seen it.

It was during their stay in the mountain cavern.

On the prince's right temple, and close to the hair, was a kind of mole, or fleshy excrescence of a very remarkable character, and any one having once seen it would certainly know it again.

Unquestionably it was this for which the valet looked.

He would not find it.

Turpin knew that well enough, and finally gave himself up for lost.

To conceal his agitation, he took up the glass before him, and raised it to his lips.

But his fingers refused to grasp it properly, and it fell with a loud crash to the floor.

This had the effect of turning all eyes towards him.

He laughed lightly, and muttered an excuse about his carelessness.

Among the rest the valet turned.

His eye fell upon Turpin's countenance.

He knew him instantly.

He nearly betrayed his recognition, but, by great presence of mind, he controlled himself.

Then a fresh current of ideas rushed through his mind.

He bent down once more over the head.

Dick Turpin he knew to be one of the prince's most devoted adherents.

What did he do, then, in the enemy's camp.

Why should he be here?

The mole, too, which he had seen a thousand times was absent from the head on the table before him.

Was it some deep laid plan to pass off a spurious head, and so allow the prince a chance of escape?

He thought so.

When once the idea took possession of his mind, it strengthened every moment.

Should he befriend his prince?

Unquestionably.

It was his duty.

But how was he to do it?

Was he to declare the fraud, and say the head before him was not that of his master?

Or was he to say it was?

The question was a difficult one.

How should he decide?

He determined to look at Turpin.

By the expression of his countenance, he judged he should be able to tell which he ought to do.

These thoughts had swept through his brain in an infinitesimal portion of time.

In fact, while he made, or affected to make, an examination of the prince's countenance.

Then he raised his head, taking care as he did so, to look at Turpin.

The latter had his eyes fixed upon the valet, and he gave a look of such deep meaning that it was quite impossible to mistake it.

Fortunately this was not observed.

The attention of all just then was centred upon the valet. "Spoke," said the governor, "and speak truly. Is that the head of the Young Pretender?"

"It is," said Morrison, firmly, "and I am quite ready now to swear to it at any moment after the examination I have made."

Turpin smiled triumphantly.

The danger was past.

The governor had a look of deep vexation on his visage. It was clear he wished the decision to be otherwise.

"Stop!" he said. "How can you tell? How can you make so sure?"

"I knew him."

"I am aware of that, but why did you look at the right temple?"

As he spoke, the governor leant forward in his chair, and raised the hair in the same manner as the valet had done.

Here was a new difficulty.

But luckily the valet, while looking for the mole, had noticed a slight scar upon the temple, so he did not hesitate to say—

"I had often noticed on the prince's left temple a certain mark."

"And what was it?"

"A scar, almost imperceptible, but yet to be distinguished, on the left temple."

"It is here!"

"Your royal highness," said Turpin, who felt sure the danger had now passed away, "I really hope this testimony will be sufficient."

"Mein Gott, yes!"

"I am glad to hear you say as much. That I felt very anxious I cannot deny; but, then, if this man had declared it was not the prince's head, I should have been in a very awkward position, and not only that, have lost the reward as well!"

The duke nodded.

"But now, when it is impossible for there to exist a doubt, I do hope you will treat, or cause me to be treated, in a less suspicious manner than heretofore."

"How?"

"I will explain, your grace. Wherever I have moved I have found an armed party at my heels, which is exceedingly disagreeable, but not only that, I have been deprived of my weapons."

"It shall be altered. Give me your hand; I will recommend you to ze king in London."

"Thanks, your grace!"

"As for zis man, ze prince's valet, he shall consider he has earned von freedom, but he must us accompany to ze king."

"I am willing," said the valet, who, with the natural perspicacity of a Scotchman, had divined pretty correctly the state of affairs, and was only too glad of an opportunity of serving this last scion of the house of Stuart.

The governor was thus completely discomfited.

It was not, however, out of any feeling to Dick Turpin that he had spoken as he did, but he was of an incredulous disposition, and would never believe anything until it was incontestably proved to be right.

That Dick had found it very disagreeable and uncomfortable to be so closely watched and to be disarmed, and he received the assurance that it should be altered with the utmost pleasure.

And so this event, which looked at first so unfavourable to him, really turned out to his advantage in more ways than one.

In life how often is this the case?

It was decided that the troops should remain in Edinburgh twenty-four hours, in order to thoroughly refresh themselves.

Now Dick, it must be understood, had latterly had another inconvenience to put up with.

And that was, he was short of that most essential requisite, money.

But this he had been careful to keep secret.

Now that a close watch was no longer to be kept upon him, he felt he might replenish his purse.

In the evening, therefore, he obtained a pass from the Duke of Cumberland to allow him egress from the castle, ostensibly to pay a visit to some friends of his.

In reality, to resume his old life as a Knight of the Road.

CHAPTER CCXXII.

DICK TURPIN ONCE MORE RESUMES HIS OLD VOCATION OF KNIGHT OF THE ROAD, AND MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE.

With a very great amount of diffidence and reluctance the author of "Black Bess" ventures for the first time to address himself personally to his numerous readers.

But let it be clearly understood that it is necessity, not choice, which has dictated this step.

That the present romance has achieved a success totally without parallel in the annals of literature, is a fact which must be patent to all.

For this amount of patronage the author begs, in the first place, to tender his sincerest thanks.

But the extraordinary success of the present work, however gratifying it may be to the author, has had a contrary effect upon many others.

Envy, the most despicable and yet the most prevalent passion to which humanity is prone, has been plentifully engendered by it.

Other publishers, jealous of the approbation with which the present work has been universally received, have been instigated by this passion—not in a fair spirit of competition, or the desire of pleasing the public—to put forth other works of a similar character, in order that by so doing the sale of the present one should be injured.

But all these attempts, the author is proud and happy to say, have signally and deservedly failed, and he would not have alluded to the matter at all except for the following reason.

About a month or five weeks ago, a work was put forth of a character precisely similar to this, and, so far as the printing goes, as close an imitation as it is possible to make.

Not content, however, with trading in a disreputable manner upon this work, and introducing Dick Turpin as the hero, the unscrupulous and dishonourable proprietor has had the audacity to print in large letters upon the outside of the wrapper the words—

"Companion to 'Black Bess; or, the Knight of the Road,'"

so as to deceive the public by inducing the belief that it was from the pen of the same writer.

Now, what the author of "Black Bess; or, the Knight of the Road," wishes to say to his readers distinctly and emphatically is, that he has no connection whatever with this work. It is got up solely with the view of doing him an injury, and such being the case, he hopes that his readers will not in any way individually give the least encouragement to this bare-faced imposition.

Unfortunately the law, stringent as it is in most things, is very lax in that of copyright, or protecting an author's prescriptive title to his work, or otherwise legal steps would have been taken to suppress its issue.

But the same effect will be produced if the readers of this work refuse to purchase it, for let them bear in mind the fact that every copy they purchase assists in the maintenance of a fraud, and inflicts a direct injury upon the author.

One by one the puny and disreputable attempts to supplant him in the favour of his subscribers has proved abortive. They have lingered out a painful existence, died away, and been forgotten.

But "Black Bess" has had a uniformly large and steady circulation from the first, and the author here promises that no effort shall be wanting on his part to retain it.

At the present moment there is only one work by his hand besides this in circulation, and this is entitled "Blue-skin," the only work that can, with any justice, be styled a companion to "Black Bess."

This has been mentioned because, not content with what has been described, the proprietor of the disreputable work in question has endeavoured, by distorting the words, to make it appear to be written by the author of this romance.

Under all these circumstances, it was felt that for once the authors to this work should be appealed to, and urged to use their best exertions in putting an end to such unfair and disgraceful competition.

The author, however, would wish to say one word more before he parts company with his readers.

Letters have from time to time been forwarded to him,

containing the query "is 'Black Bess' a true story?"

All of these the author would refer to the first portion of chapter the sixth.

But, in addition to what is there set down, it may be stated that the chief incidents are strictly true, and as the narrative proceeds, it will be found that the greatest pains will be taken to make the terminations of the careers of the four highwaymen correct.

With these words the author takes his leave, but not without again expressing his cordial thanks for the support and favour they have so steadily accorded to his efforts.

Armed with the pass which the Duke of Cumberland had given him, Dick Turpin ordered his mare, Black Bess, to be saddled, and, when the night had fully come, sallied out into the silent streets.

Soon, however, he left the city behind, and gained the open country.

Then, when he reined in his steed upon the highway, and listened for the approach of any travellers, a wild sort of glee filled his heart, so forcibly was the old time brought back to him.

When he reflected upon the strange life he had led during the past few months, he could scarcely believe that it was not a dream.

The absence and perilous position of his three companions soon made it seem reality.

A deep shudder involuntarily swept over him as he thought of the peril he had so safely passed through that afternoon.

His life then had hung upon a thread.

And now he is once more the Knight of the Road—bold, dashing, and chivalrous as he had been in former times.

He wondered what had taken place in London during his absence, and whether he had been forgotten.

But especially did the recollections of those who had proved themselves his friends in the hour when they were most needed occupy his mind, and he felt like one who had long been absent in some foreign country, and who was looking forward to a return to his native land.

But a peculiar movement on the part of Black Bess soon roused him from his reverie.

It was one that she was wont to give, and signified the approach of some vehicle along the road.

He listened, and found that the warning given by this faithful creature was a real one.

Some one was coming.

A better position than that which he had taken up could scarcely have been found.

The night was dark, but clear.

Right and left of him, to a considerable distance in both directions, was the broad high-road.

Behind him was a tall and closely-grown hedge, which served as a most excellent background.

In the distance the forms both of himself and his mare were invisible.

Grasping a large holster pistol firmly in his right hand, which he had previously ascertained to be ready for immediate use, he waited.

The sound of the approaching traveller could now be heard with very great distinctness.

Although he had been so long differently employed, Dick had not forgotten his old skill, and, as he listened, he could tell with certainty that it was a vehicle on two wheels, drawn by one horse that was coming.

The speed was enough to show that it was of some light character.

It was from the direction of the city that the sound came.

For this he was glad.

The probability is, that had it been going the reverse way, he would have allowed it to pass un molested.

A recognition would have been awkward.

A minute more, and then he saw the faint flashing of two carriage lamps.

When he first caught sight of them they looked like two tiny stars behind a vapoury cloud, but they rapidly increased in size and brightness, until at length they shed a light all round them, illuminating the trees and hedges and mossy banks which skirted the highway.

The light, however, was perplexing to Dick's vision, and he was unable to see what was coming, or who was seated in it.

He had to judge by his ear alone.

At length, having waited till the vehicle was nearly opposite to him, he darted out from his place of partial concealment.

"Halt!" he cried, in loud, deep tones, such as would arrest the attention of any one. "Halt, I say, or I fire!"

A faint shriek followed his words, and upon looking closer, Dick could see that the vehicle he had stopped was a kind of tilbury, a conveyance at that time very much in use, and that two persons were seated in it.

One was a female, and it was unquestionably from her lips that the faint shriek had come.

The other was a man.

He held the reins in one hand and a whip in the other, but upon hearing Turpin's summons, he dropped the latter and drew a pistol, the trigger of which he pulled with great rapidity.

The aim he had taken was a good one, and the career of the gallant highwayman would then and there have been brought to a close but for one circumstance.

The hammer snapped upon the lock, and the powder in the pan flashed, but the pistol did not explode.

It ought to be understood that pistols in those days were made rather differently to what they are now.

The invention of the percussion cap, which makes missing fire a very rare circumstance indeed, was not then known.

In place of it there was a piece of flint, the spark from which set fire to the powder in the pan, and that was communicated to the pistol.

But if the powder was to shake out or get damp, or the small touch-hole got clogged up, a misfire would be the inevitable result.

CHAPTER CCXXXIII

DICK TURPIN STOPS THE TRAVELLERS ON THE HIGHWAY, BUT HAS TO FLY FOR HIS LIFE.

WITH a bitter curse the traveller flung the useless weapon in the roadway.

Ere he could draw another from his pocket, or urge his horse forward, Dick Turpin grasped him by the throat.

He pressed the muzzle of a pistol against his temples.

The female who was with him uttered a succession of shrieks of so piercing a character, that were any one within half-a-mile of the spot, they would certainly hear her.

"Now," said Turpin, "you have tried to take my life, and there is no reason whatever why I should spare you. Silence!" he added, turning to the woman, "or you will not live five minutes longer!"

This threat, uttered in a cool, resolute tone, had its full effect upon the woman, for she ceased her cries at once.

Then Dick turned to the man.

"Hand over what valuables and money you carry with you, and no further violence will be offered. If you resist you cannot save yourself, and will only have your own folly to reproach for ill-usage."

The grasp Dick had of the man's throat was a very tight one, and he continued the pressure so long that he was scarcely able to move.

"Give up your money, John," said the woman, "and save your life. The one you can replace, but not the other."

"Spoken like a sensible woman," cried Dick, releasing the man's throat. "Take your wife's advice, for such she is, I fancy, and make certain of this, that if you attempt to move in the least, or try to injure me, the lives of both of you will pay the penalty. In general I am a temperate man, but when my temper is roused, I am a desperate one. Quick! Hand over!"

The traveller was about to comply with this forcible request, when there suddenly arose upon the night air shouts of many voices, and the trampling of many hooves' feet.

A curse came from Dick's lips as he heard both the sounds, for it looked very much as though he was going to have all his trouble for nothing.

But the traveller seemed to draw hope from it.

Turpin, however, was determined not to let his prey slip through his fingers if he could help it, and though he

felt he was running a great risk, he did not change his position in the slightest degree, but said—

"Quick! quick! On your life, quick! Hand over your money, I say! If you hesitate or palter with me, you are a dead man! Quick, I say!"

"Give it him, John! give it him!" said the woman again, in an imploring and terrified tone of voice. "Give it to him! It is not much for you to lose, and I am sure it will be best."

But the husband disregarded the wife's appeal.

Louder and louder grew the shouts, and the trampling of hoofs, and every second served to bring them frightfully near.

That they were some persons who had heard the wife's screams, and were hastening in the direction of the sounds, there could be little doubt.

They were in considerable force, let them be who they might.

Dick could tell that.

He knew that it would be madness for him to attempt to cope with such numbers.

They were not yet in sight, so he did not move.

He pressed the pistol against the man's head.

"Now," he cried, "you have one chance of your life! Hand me over your money!"

The wife was too much alarmed to speak.

But the husband, gathering courage from the nearness of the new comers, replied, resolutely—

"Never!"

At the same moment he tried to wrest the pistol from Dick's hands.

But the highwayman was too quick for him.

"I will count three," he said, with the most perfect coolness, "and if, when I pronounce the last, you have not handed me your purse, I will surely fire!"

The horsemen still came on.

"One!" cried Dick.

He held the pistol in such a manner that the muzzle completely covered the traveller's person.

"Two!" he cried. "I shall say three, and then if you are still obstinate, your death be upon your own head!"

The traveller, seeing the determined character of the man he had to deal with, and that he was a highwayman of no ordinary kind, at last saw the prudence of sacrificing what money he might carry with him rather than his life.

Accordingly, he produced from a breast-pocket a heavy and good-sized purse.

This Turpin took instantly.

He was only just in time.

About a hundred yards off was a body of horsemen.

There must have been from a dozen to a score of them. That he was seen seemed pretty certain, for all uttered a loud shout.

But Turpin, having accomplished his ends in procuring a sum of money, was all right.

Placing the purse in his pocket, he turned Black Bess's head in the direction of the open country, and giving her the rein, darted off at a tremendous pace.

The angry tones of the man's voice, who had parted with his money so reluctantly, rose for a moment on the night air, and then he was out of earshot.

The horsemen, whoever they were, did not wait long to listen to his complaints and expostulations, but prepared to give chase to the highwayman.

But they knew not the matchless steed upon which he was mounted, or they would have saved themselves the trouble of their ride.

Dick would gladly have learned who and what they were, but he could not quite see how he was to do this.

He scarcely thought they were police-officers, but let them be whom they might, he determined to lead them a good dance across the country.

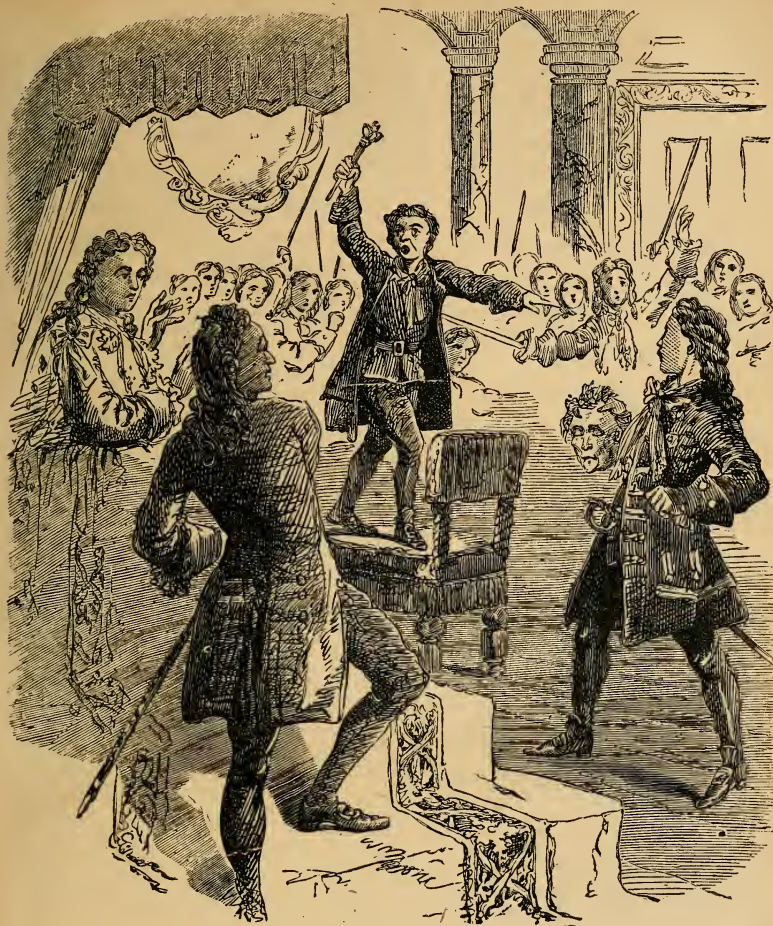
Accordingly, he tightened the rein a little, and reduced Black Bess's speed.

A clear level road was before him, though where it led, or how far it went, he had no idea.

The beat of horses' hoofs at full gallop soon reached his ear.

Still he slackened his pace, determined, if possible, to obtain a glimpse of his foes and, ascertain their character.

A shout from the rear made him aware of their proximity, so he turned round to look.



[DICK TURPIN IS DETECTED IN THE SALOON.]

All he could see was a dense body of men on horseback. Beyond that he could form no idea of their appearance whatever.

Still lingering, he nearly paid the penalty of his life, for the sharp report of a pistol arose, and a bullet whistled past his cheek.

It was immediately followed by another, which showed him the nature of the men with whom he had to deal.

To tarry longer would be insanity, so he gave up the attempt of endeavouring to ascertain who they were, and dropped once more the reins upon his mare's neck.

She had been all the time anxious to proceed, and the moment she felt her head at freedom, she sped over the ground with a succession of long, sweeping leaps.

Each one was made apparently without the least exertion, so gently and gracefully was the action performed.

It was, however, a race that got over the crown with wondrous celerity.

Before he could get out of pistol range, though, he was saluted with several more shots.

By none of them was he injured.

This is not to be wondered at.

Those who have tried to take aim with a fire-arm while riding at full gallop well know how extremely difficult it is to hit the object aimed at.

For this reason, then, Turpin was unhurt.

So soon as he was at a safe distance once more, he proceeded to carry out his original intention.

The reason that principally moved him was this.

He did not wish to exhaust his mare's strength any more than he could help.

A brief time only would have to elapse, and then the march would be resumed—a march more tedious and tiring than the preceding one.

By contriving to keep a little ahead of them, Dick fancied he should soon tire their patience out, and so be able to return to the city at a gentle pace.

Had he known who his pursuers were, he would have at once dismissed the idea as absurd.

But he was in ignorance of it, and was likely to remain so.

Most perseveringly they kept upon his track, and by the sound alone could he tell that they were sparing neither whip nor spur to urge their horses onward.

In a short time he found it necessary to increase the speed of his own mare, in order to maintain the same distance between them.

This was not what he wished.

Still he kept on, wishing, if possible, to fire them out.

But of this there seemed no prospect.

On the contrary, it looked as though they would wire out him.

Reluctantly, then, Dick was forced to the conclusion that he would have to change his tactics.

His pursuers were not to be easily shaken off.

This gave him a little anxiety.

It seemed to show that they had some stronger motive for pursuing him than mere desire of assisting the man in the gig to recover his loss.

But if they were not officers, what special motive could they have?

Dick knew not, and finding it impossible to come to a satisfactory conclusion respecting it, ceased to perplex his brain, but turned the whole of his attention to getting away from them.

The only means by which this could be done would be the adoption of some stratagem that would send them on a wrong track.

He looked round right and left.

On either side of him were tall hedgerows and meadows beyond.

Should he take to these, and striking across them, find a circuitous way back to Edinburgh?

He thought so.

But he would have to get completely out of earshot, first, because if he did not they would know, by the cessation of the beat of the horse's hoofs that he had stopped.

Accordingly, he spoke a few encouraging words to his matchless steed.

As he did so he gradually slackened the reins.

Then, as an additional inducement for her to make greater speed, he pressed his heels gently against her flanks.

She responded by a slight neigh, and dashed forward at a pace that fairly made Dick shut his teeth together, and hold his breath.

CHAPTER CCXXIV.

DICK TURPIN, BY A STRANGE ACCIDENT, DISCOVERS WHO AND WHAT HIS PURSUERS ARE.

FOR NOT more than three minutes did Dick Turpin allow his mare to continue this tremendous pace.

At the expiration of that time, he began gradually to rein her in.

He continued doing so until she came to a dead stop.

Then he listened.

Faintly, very faintly, but increasing each moment in loudness and distinctness, he could hear the tramp, tramp, of his pursuers.

But he considered, from the gradual manner in which he had reined Bess in, that they would imagine rather that he had distanced them, rather than that he had stopped.

As for himself, he considered at the time he halted that he was out of hearing.

The sound of their approach still came to his ears, but then they were in large numbers, and the noise they would make would be proportionately greater than his.

But there was no time to lose.

Drawing back to the one side of the road, he prepared to take a leap over the hedgerow into the meadows.

But while he did so, his quick ear caught another sound.

It was very slight, and one that might well have escaped

observation.

He listened.

But only for a second.

It was merely to assure himself that he was right.

A single horseman was approaching him.

He was coming, too, at a sharp pace.

This circumstance, slight as it was, filled Dick's brain with hope.

It afforded him the chance he wished for of making a

Without longer hesitation, he patted Bess upon the neck, and put her to the leap.

There was a very short distance to run and gave a spring, but it was enough.

She cleared the obstruction gallantly, and alighted upon the soft turf in the meadow with a scarcely perceptible shock.

At this moment the moon, which during the whole of the night had not once permitted her face to be seen, broke forth.

The landscape for miles around was lighted up as if by magic.

It would scarcely have been possible, at the present juncture of affairs, to have found a circumstance more unfavourable to the highwayman than this was.

To have struck across the meadows would have been ridiculous.

His pursuers would have seen him instantly.

There was only one resource.

That was, to lie down close under the hedge, and trusting to their passing the spot without noticing him.

It was running a great risk.

He resolved upon it, however, because he felt certain that it was the best thing to be done.

Short as was the time which had elapsed since he first halted, it was long enough to enable his pursuers to get close to where he was hidden.

A minute or two more and they would be in sight.

The horseman, too, that he had heard coming from the opposite direction, was now as nearly as he could guess at an equal distance from him.

If this was the case, the meeting would take place just in front of where he was.

Well tutored as Bess was, he had but little difficulty in forcing her to lie down.

In order to keep her still, he put his hand upon her head.

There was one thing which reconciled Turpin, in a great measure, to the risk he was going to run.

He should be able to see his pursuers.

By parting the hedge a little with one hand, he could see very plainly into the roadway, while the chance of any one seeing him was very small indeed.

There was little or no shadow cast by the hedges on the high-road, and the rays of the moon lighted it up with great distinctness.

The longer Dick listened to the trampling hoofs, the more he became convinced that his previous calculation was correct, and that a meeting would take place as nearly opposite to him as possible.

His patience was not much taxed.

By the time he had completed all his preparations, and taken up a convenient position, they were not more than a hundred yards distant.

He heard his pursuers give a loud shout when they saw the single horseman riding towards them.

Of course, owing to the moon's light, they could not see him a long way off.

The cry was one of astonishment, and Turpin interpreted it as signifying that they had fallen into the very natural mistake of supposing that the reason they heard the tramp of hoofs before them grow plainer and plainer was, because they fancied they were gaining upon the highwayman.

It might have been that the moon, happening to peep forth at the moment she did, was an unfortunate one for Dick, but it was, most assuredly, a fortunate one for the traveller.

Had they not seen him, his life would probably have been sacrificed.

On came the little troop, and then they pulled up with a jerk.

The traveller also reined in his steed.

They were face to face.

Dick had an excellent view of both.

The traveller was an elderly man, mounted upon a dappled-gray horse.

His hair was long and white, and a patriarchal-looking beard of the same hue descended upon his breast.

There was an air of great distinction about him, although he rode unattended.

He was, in fine, one of those men who involuntarily command the respect of all with whom they come in

From this individual Dick's eyes turned to the troop of horsemen who had given him so much trouble.

They were all plainly-dressed, well-armed men, with the exception of one.

That one Dick knew instantly.

He wore a military costume.

He was one of the officers composing the staff of the commander-in-chief.

His name was Major Nicholson.

Dick took all this in at a glance, but before he could make any reflections upon what he saw, the major spoke.

If anything had been wanting to make Dick quite sure of his identity, his voice would have sufficed.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he said, politely, addressing the traveller, "but have you come far along this road?"

"By what right do you ask?"

"I will tell you," said the major; "because every moment is of the utmost importance."

"I suppose you mean to yourself?"

"Precisely."

"Then, sir, be good enough to understand that the same words apply to me in an equal respect as to yourself. Every moment is of importance."

"We are in chase of a highwayman," said the major, smothering the irritation of temper which he experienced at being treated in so off-hand a manner.

"Well, sir."

"We have kept hard upon his track for some miles, and when we heard your horse's hoofs, so far from thinking that it was any one approaching, we fancied we were gaining upon him."

"Then, sir, allow me to pass, and don't trouble me any longer. I know nothing about the highwayman."

"No, sir; but—"

"But what? You surely don't imagine that I am he, do you?"

"Certainly not; but, perhaps you have come some distance along the road, and, if so, you can tell us whether a man, mounted upon a beautiful black horse, has passed you?"

"I have come more than ten miles along this road," replied the elderly traveller, and I will give you my word that no one answering to the description you mention has passed me."

"Enough, sir. And I suppose you have not seen anything of him?"

"No, I have not."

"Then, in some mysterious way he has eluded us, and yet he has never been fairly out of earshot. Pass on, sir, and accept our thanks."

"You are quite welcome," said the old man, raising his hat about a couple of inches above his head.

As he spoke, he struck his horse with his spurs and rode forward.

The troop of men parted in the centre, and allowed him to pass through.

After he had gone, the horsemen looked rather blankly at each other and inquiringly upon the major.

They wanted to know what had better be done next.

The major himself looked vexed and bewildered.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked.

The question elicited a general negatory shake of the head.

"It is no good riding any further, that I can see," he added. "Surely that gentleman would never have deceived us?"

"You may depend he has not," said one.

"Why so?"

"The highwayman has doubled upon us in so many ways, and, perhaps, by this time is a dozen miles off."

"But how?" said the major, "how? We have no manner of speaking, lost sight of him. How can we have got off?"

"That is more than I can tell, sir, but, if he was a real highwayman, and one used to the trade, he would manage to avoid us without much trouble."

"I can't see it," said the major.

"Why, I remember a remarkable instance of their cleverness. Have you ever heard of Dick Turpin?"

"Dick Turpin?"

"Yes."

"No, I don't know that I have particularly."

"You have been absent for a long time in the wars, so I suppose that is the reason. Well, this Dick Turpin is a

very famous highwayman, or was, I ought to say, for nothing has been heard of him lately."

"Well, what of him?"

"A party of officers once chased this Dick Turpin a long way into the country, and then back to London again, for, though he doubled upon them, they were soon after him. However, he distanced them completely, and the officers' horses being quite knocked up, they turned back and stopped awhile at the village of Acton, which they had passed through some time before. They had not stood drinking at the bar very long before a man came in and told them that the very man they had chased so much further on the London-road was at that moment on the top of his cart, and that his cart was in the inn yard!"

CHAPTER CXXV.

MAJOR NICHOLSON TRIES VERY HARD TO DEFEAT DICK TURPIN.

"But how could that be?" roared the major.

"I don't know, sir; but when the officers got outside they found what the man said was true enough. There was Dick Turpin lying on the top of some turnips in the cart, as comfortable as he could be."

"But it's impossible," cried the major; "quite impossible."

"May be, sir, but they caught him. And so, after hearing that, if this should turn out to be a regular highwayman, we stand no chance of catching him."

"I shall be very loath to give it up."

"But you said you wanted us for some other business."

"I know that, but never mind, we are too late for it already, so you had better earn the money I have promised you by finding the highwayman, and taking him prisoner dead or alive, whichever you like."

"But how are we to do so, sir? We are all abroad, but, if you'll give your orders, they shall be carried out at once."

"How can I?" said the major. "I am as much abroad as yourself."

"Then, sir, I am afraid we must give it up. It is no good going further down the road. I should advise you to turn back, and examine the road all the way."

"A thought strikes me," said the major; "turn back and follow me."

With these words on his lips, and in the manner of one across whose brain some fresh idea has flashed, the major set off again in the direction he had come, with his troop of men at his heels.

Dick Turpin waited till the sounds of their retreat had quite died away, and then he rose to his feet.

Black Bess followed his example.

He did not mount, but stood with the bridle over his arm in an attitude of deep thought.

What was he to think of what he had just witnessed?

Major Nicholson was one of the officers who felt so jealous of him.

Why was he out that night, thus armed and thus attended?

What idea was it that had crossed his mind when he so suddenly determined to retrace his steps?

These were questions almost impossible of solution.

But Dick did not despair of coming to a reasonable conclusion.

He patted his mare abstractedly upon the neck, while he endeavoured, link by link, to form a chain of thought.

At last his face brightened, and though there was no one by to hear what he said, he spoke, as people often do when they arrive at the solution of any matter that has puzzled them.

"I have it," he said. "I see it all now, and I must be speedy. Yes, this Major Nicholson was one who

showed himself jealous and suspicious of me from the first moment. He it was that caused me to be deprived of my arms, and treated almost like a prisoner. Perhaps he may suspect something, though by his manner when the man spoke of me, he did not appear to know my name; but that is nothing. It is my firm belief that, when he learned I had a pass from the duke, he set out to watch me, and hired those men from the city to accompany him. Thank goodness! I have avoided them. Steady! Steady!

These last words were addressed to his mare, as he prepared to mount her.

It so happened that Dick exactly hit upon the truth in his surmises.

Major Nicholson, like many another officer in the army, had firmly resolved that the large reward offered for the head of Charles Stuart should fall into no other hands than his.

Therefore, when Turpin appeared and laid claim to it, he looked upon him as a deadly foe—as an interloper, who had stepped in between him and his rights.

His immediate impulse was to try all he could to place obstacles in the way of Dick obtaining his desires.

With a dog-in-the-manger sort of spirit, he determined that, if he could not have the reward, no one else should—that is, if he could in any way prevent it.

But the story which Dick told was too plausible and too circumstantial for him to be able to pick a flaw in it, and, besides which, it was unvaryingly adhered to.

Accordingly, he had managed to indirectly suggest to the commander-in-chief the expediency of depriving Turpin of his arms, and treating him as a prisoner-of-war, which, as we have seen, was done.

The suspicions which the governor of the castle had, infused a fresh current of thought into his mind.

He was present at the time when the Duke granted the order for Dick to leave the castle.

After a little deliberation, he made a similar request. Of course, it was acceded to.

Going, then, into the city, he hired a dozen men, all mounted and armed, to accompany him upon an expedition.

What that expedition was, he kept locked in his own breast.

At the appointed hour the little troop was ready, and he rejoined them at the place agreed upon.

From where they stood, a view could be obtained of all persons leaving the castle.

They waited here for some moments, and then the sound of the heavy door being unfastened reached their ears.

In a moment or so afterwards, Dick made his appearance.

The major did not move, but watched him until he had proceeded for some distance.

Then he followed.

He had taken, previously, a very ingenious precaution to prevent Dick hearing that he was followed.

Over each horse's hoofs he had caused a thick worsted covering to be drawn.

By this means, the footsteps of the horses were rendered inaudible.

They followed like spectres.

They were very careful, too, not to draw too close, so as to be seen, but allowed the trampling of Bess's hoofs to be their sole guide.

But, suddenly, the horse which the major rode, from some cause or other—probably from the manner in which his feet were bandaged—grew restive, and, had not his rider been a most accomplished horseman, he would have been thrown.

The others were, of course, obliged to come to a halt, and everything was tried to soothe the terrified animal, but all in vain.

The major, in his agitation, probably increased the terror of the steed, for this delay was the most provoking thing that could possibly be.

Had such a feat been practicable, he would, rather than have wasted the time, have dismounted, and taken a steed from one of his followers; but such an attempt would be full of danger, and, besides, no one when riding likes to be mastered by a horse.

At length, after great loss of time, the animal suffered himself to be calmed down, and then it was found that the cord by which the worsted bandage had been bound to his leg had moved in some way, and got tightly drawn.

This, however, was seen to, and then the horse was quiet enough.

It was at this moment that there came to the ears of the whole party a succession of shrieks which must have been loud and shrill on— but, owing to the distance, had become faint.

A fresh start was just then about to be made, and the major, with a smile of triumph on his face, ordered his men to push on at full speed.

The shrieks continued.

In a little while, owing to the stony ground, the coverings over the hoofs were but now the major did not heed the sound.

When he arrived, however, he was just too late.

From the man and woman together, however, he learned they had been stopped and robbed by a highwayman.

Upon receipt of this intelligence he bade the men give chase, and endeavour to overtake him.

The result of this has been already seen.

Of course, the reader is in possession of a few more facts than Turpin was, but the bold highwayman was not very far off the mark.

Satisfied with himself so far, and feeling quite assured that he had baffled the major, he set about thinking what it was that had induced him to turn back so suddenly.

As in the former instance, this for a long time baffled him.

He considered it, though, as rather a secondary affair, and, while pursuing his thoughts, struck across the meadows in a direct line for the city.

At last he reached a broadish road—not the one he had previously travelled, but one that evidently trended to his destination.

A low hedge divided him from it, and this he did not attempt to leap, but walked on in the expectation of finding a gate through which he could pass, and thus gain it without difficulty.

Nor was he disappointed in this expectation.

After skirting the hedge for about a hundred yards, he came to one.

It was fastened, but not locked.

Dismounting, he quickly undid the chain, and flinging the gate open, allowed his mare to pass through.

Then, in order not to leave any palpable traces of the way he had come, he refastened it, which was done by passing the links of a chain through one another.

"There," he said, as he once again seated himself in the saddle, "that will do. I rather think the major has taken a vast deal of trouble to little or no purpose. However, we shall see. Come, lass!"

At a very gentle pace, for Dick had given Bess more work than he intended, he took his way along this road.

It seemed a very lonely and unfrequented one.

He did not meet a soul.

The moon had climbed higher and higher in the sky, and the clouds, which at the commencement of the night had covered the heavens, were now entirely gone.

It was really a beautiful night, and Dick, as he went, hummed a few staves of a popular drinking song, but his thoughts were chiefly occupied by Major Nicholson, and wondering what fresh scheme he had hatched against him.

In this way a couple of miles were passed over, and then, in the distance, Dick, by the aid of the moonbeams, perceived a building of some sort.

On a nearer approach, he found this to be a road-side inn.

Simultaneously with the making of this discovery, a fresh thought darted into his mind, and he resolved to carry it out at once.

"I wonder I never thought of that before," he muttered.

"Never mind, it is none too late. Now, Mr. Major Nicholson, I think I shall be even with you! Ha! ha! you had need be sharp to outwit Dick Turpin!"

He laughed lightly as he spoke.

In one more minute he drew up opposite the inn door.

It was open, and from one of the windows on the ground floor streamed a faint light, thus showing that, late as the hour was, the inmates had not yet retired to rest.

CHAPTER CCXXVI.

DICK TURPIN GROOMS AND FEEDS BLACK BESS AFTER A FASHION OF HIS OWN, AND COMPLETELY Baffles MAJOR NICHOLSON.

"HALLO, there! hallo!" shouted Turpin, and as he spoke he took from his pocket one of his pistols, and, grasping it by the barrel, knocked with the butt end upon the doorpost.

His summons was quickly replied to by a tall, gaunt-looking woman, with a rather remarkable-looking widow's cap on her head.

"What do you want, sir?" said she respectfully, for Dick's important manner had its full effect upon her.

"I want my horse seen to," said Dick, "in the first place."

"Yes, sir, of course."

"Have you an ostler?"

"Oh! dear, yes, sir! I'll call him. Jim! Jim!"

In reply to this call a shock-headed urchin of about fourteen years of age made his appearance.

He understood at once what was meant, and Dick, having dismounted, led the way to the stables.

Here the highwayman, with his own hands, carefully groomed his steed.

Of course, in her progress that night, she had got in a sad plight.

Her usually sleek skin was rough and wet with perspiration, and foam was about the bridle, and on her lips and nostrils.

Her legs, too, showed that she had crossed more than one ploughed field.

All these indications of a hard gallop, Dick once after another carefully removed, until at last not a single trace was left.

To have looked at her and her trappings, no one would have believed that she had been out of the stable.

When this was over, Dick sent the boy for a quart measure of ale.

Then, going to the cornbin, he took out a small quantity of oats and chaff.

These he well mixed together, and, as soon as the boy brought the ale, he proceeded, very much to that individual's surprise, to moisten the whole with it.

This would be beneficial for two reasons.

In the state that Bess was then in it would have been very injudicious either to have allowed her to drink water or eat dry food.

But by moistening the corn and chaff in the manner we have described with a quart of ale, both evils would be remedied, and great additional vigour imparted to the animal.

Dick did not go into the inn himself, but stood by his mare while she ate, taking care all the time that she did not eat too quickly.

He sent the boy, however, for another quart of ale, the greater part of which he drank himself, and then handed it to him for his trouble.

Dick waited for some time after Bess had finished her meal, and every now and then he rubbed her down with a wisp of clean hay.

But she was quite cool now, or nearly so.

Feeling satisfied, at length, that all was right, and with the conviction on his mind that the major would be rather disappointed, Dick led Black Bess into the stable yard, and mounting her, rode off at a gentle trot.

Soon afterwards the portals of the grim old castle were reached.

He was challenged by the sentry, but the pass from the duke, which Dick handed to him, was quite sufficient, and he was immediately allowed ingress.

He directed his steps at once to the stables.

On his way he looked keenly about on either side of him, and was presently rewarded for his trouble.

Standing in the shadow of a projecting angle of masonry, his form scarcely distinguished from the dark background behind it, was the figure of a man.

Dick took no notice, but rode carelessly on to the entrance to the stables.

A man was there to receive his steed, and, after giving some audible instructions respecting how she was to be treated, he resigned her to his care, and sauntered away towards his own quarters.

But at the earliest opportunity he stopped.

Then, taking advantage of the darkness of the wall, crept noiselessly back.

He looked at the spot where he had seen the dark form standing.

It was gone.

Still creeping onwards, he reached the stable wall, and paused before one of the windows.

The shutter was down, and through the iron bars he could see distinctly.

The murmur of voices reached his ears.

Taking care not to place himself where he would be seen, Dick strained his sense of hearing to the utmost.

But all he could manage to do was to catch a word here and there.

He was, however, tolerably satisfied.

One of the voices was that of the man into whose charge he had given Black Bess.

The other belonged to Major Nicholson.

Disjointedly as the words reached him, Dick could form a pretty good idea of their import.

The major was asking the man whether the mare had or had not had a long and hard gallop.

The man expressed himself confident that she had not. That she had not been far, and not faster than a trot.

In support of what he said, he called the major's attention to several little points, all of which tended to confirm his assertion.

The major was always hard of belief.

But he could not get over the positive testimony of the stable-keeper and the evidence of his own senses.

He had fully expected to find Black Bess in some such trim as she was when Dick so carefully cleaned and fed her.

But instead of that, there she was, cool and fresh, and looking as though she had only been a short distance, and that at a very easy rate.

Those appearances, however, had a two-fold origin.

One was the excellent quality of the mare herself.

The other was the skill with which her master had groomed her.

The major was baffled.

But not defeated.

In a rage with himself and the world in general, he dashed out of the stable.

Dick drew hastily back out of sight, for he by no means wished that the major should know he suspected him, and that he played the spy upon his actions.

Looking, however, neither to the right nor to the left, he strode up the yard.

Dick followed him at a little distance, and entering the castle, laid himself down to take all the rest he could before the march to London was commenced.

In spite, however, of his wish to sleep, he could not do so, but tossed over and over continually.

His thoughts were active, and when that is the case, sleep is quite out of the question until the brain is tired.

His thoughts were much occupied in thinking of his three comrades, and wondering in what circumstances they were then placed.

The young prince, too, whose cause he had so zealously espoused and supported, where was he?

But it was mostly upon Tom King that his thoughts rested.

Somehow or other there seemed to be a closer band of union between him and himself than there did between either of the two others.

That this feeling was reciprocal there can be no doubt.

From a consideration of these, Dick's thoughts reverted to his own position, and the dangerous ground upon which he stood.

What he had seen already of Major Nicholson was quite enough to show him the necessity there was for his continuing to keep upon his guard.

In him he saw a foe to be dreaded, because he was suspicious and sly.

Then he thought of reaching London, and the audacious feat he was about to perform, of laying the spurious head before the king and claiming the large reward.

London!

When he repeated the word, it seemed to him almost like home.

He forgot his danger.

He looked forward with pleasure to reaching it.

The time that he had been absent seemed endless.

What a joy he felt it would be to make his way to the "White Horse," in Drury-lane, and take jovial old Matthew by the hand.

He could fancy how his face would expand into a smile when he saw him safe and sound.

Then there was Tom Davis, who had shown himself to be in the hour of necessity a staunch, true friend.

He could picture him, he thought, without difficulty, and the quaint old building in which he had resided for so long, and which had been in possession of his family for so many generations.

Dick felt that to once more meet this free and good-

hearted spirit would be a pure delight indeed, and he could tell with what interest he would listen to the story of the adventures he had met with during his long absence.

Then arose another recollection of a face that would smile, and a heart that would grow light in his presence.

This was Ellen.

The poor nameless, homeless, friendless, ill-used apprentice girl, whom he had rescued from the brutality of her rascally mistress.

His breast glowed with irrepressible joy at the remembrance of this one good deed in his career, which shone out from the rest like

Some bright particular star.

and which, he hoped, would go far to palliate many of the darker ones, against which this one shone out with all the more effulgency from the contrast.

He had changed her lot in life—had made it a happy one.

Tom Davis, with his huge, kindly heart, overflowing with sympathy and good nature as it always was, had soon felt her twine around his affections, and he had adopted her as his own child.

A sigh came from Dick's lips as he thought of the blissful calm of such an existence, and how widely different it was from his own wild and turbulent career.

Wearied out at length, he fell into a slumber, in which confused images of all his reflections were presented.

Alas! while thinking as he was, and picturing the condition of Tom Davis and Ellen, a little thought how far he was from reality.

He did not take into consideration what great and magical changes a few months will effect.

A person may arise from poverty to affluence, or sink from affluence to poverty, in such a space.

But we will not anticipate events.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

A GLANCE IS GIVEN AT DICK TURPIN'S THREE COMRADES AND THE PRINCE.

PROBABLY enough, it will be a long while before we can leave Dick in greater security than he is now, or in a situation of less danger, so we will take advantage while he is sleeping, to devote a few moments to his comrades and the unfortunate young prince.

It will be recalled that, with infinite trouble, they had procured a small boat, the owner of which had undertaken to row them to a spot where he had a few hours before seen a French vessel at anchor.

Accordingly, Charles Stuart, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack had taken their places in the frail embarkation, and stood out to sea.

Ere long, however, indications of a coming storm made themselves apparent to the eyes of all.

The boatman wished to put back to the shore, and endeavour to make some safe harbour till the fury of the winds and waves were past, but our friends would listen to no such thing.

They preferred the danger of going on to that of turning back.

Moreover, they were in hopes that they would soon gain the large vessel, and then, doubtless, all would be well; for, however much such a tempest might endanger their little craft, a large one would scarcely bow before its influence.

Their hopes, however, were doomed to be disappointed.

The storm had increased in fury.

The waves swelled.

The wind blew in short and sudden gusts.

All command over the little boat was lost.

It drifted about at the mercy of the tempest.

Suddenly, however, and with a shivering shock, it struck against some jutting rock and went to pieces.

It parted first in the centre.

With the instinct of self-preservation, each one, as he felt the shock, clutched tightly at whatever portion of the boat happened to be within their reach.

To this instinct they owed their lives.

The broken boat floated.

They had, therefore, only to maintain their grasp.

That they would do this there was little fear.

The tenacity with which persons in danger of drowning

will cling to anything which they have once seized is proverbial.

The wind howled mournfully.

The din of the storm increased.

As the four breathless beings held on for dear life to the boat, they felt themselves raised high in the air by the force of a gigantic wave.

Then they were propelled violently forward.

Blinded and half-conscious, they felt themselves cast upon a rocky shore.

The wave receded.

They were once more on land.

But the wave which had carried them there would return, and wash them back into the deep.

That is, unless they either got out of its reach or shifted their grasp from the fragments of wood to some immovable object.

The latter was what they did.

From the shore upon which they had been so suddenly and violently cast jutted up numberless pieces of rock conical in shape, and a few inches in height.

These were firmly imbedded in the sand, being, so to speak, the excrescences of the large rock which loomed up behind them like a giant.

They could not communicate with each other in any way.

The tempest drowned their voices in its roar.

They could not tell each other what to do.

But blinded, bruised, and semi-conscious as they were, each had the same idea at the same moment.

Letting go the boat, they clasped with might and main one of the little rocks.

And only just in time.

The wave came back.

Tons of water were poured upon them.

They felt themselves rising.

They felt the rock slipping from their fingers.

Then the wave receded.

Once more, then, were they allowed an opportunity of drawing breath and renewing their store of life.

But before they could thoroughly recover, the wave came back again.

This time they fancied with less force.

And so wave after wave, wave after wave broke over them.

Still they did not quit their hold, but pressed their bodies as tightly as they could against the sand.

But now, as a longer interval elapsed between each wave, so did they decrease in their intensity, until at last, though the ocean still heaved and tumbled, they did not reach them at all.

Then all lapsed into unconsciousness.

The wind lulled.

The sea no longer rolled in huge, mountainous billows, but, as if thoroughly exhausted, sunk into a dead calm.

The remainder of the night passed away, and then the sun rose.

His beams revealed no other tokens of the preceding night's devastation than those five still and deathlike looking forms clinging to the pointed rocks.

At last Claude Duval, who was the strongest of the party, and in whom the vital principle was most firmly implanted, aroused himself.

He was the one who had sustained the least injuries.

He gradually raised himself to a sitting posture.

Several groans came from his lips as he did so, for he felt as though every bone in his body was broken.

For a little while he was at a loss to remember what had occurred, and could scarcely believe that what he saw was reality.

Presently his eye rested upon the forms of his companions.

Then, like a flash of light, there swept across his brain a recollection of all that had occurred.

As he sat up and looked about him, he felt that he was every moment getting better, so at length he crawled to the person next to him.

He was lying on his face.

Whether he was alive or dead, he knew not.

He turned him over.

It was Tom King.

The faint moans which came from his lips, now that his position had been altered, took a great load off Claude's mind, for it showed that he still lived.

Situated as he then was, he felt he could do little towards assisting him to recover his senses, so he left Nature to take her course, and crawled onwards to the next form.

This was the boatman.

He, too, was living and revivifying under the beams of the rising sun, which poured down every moment an increase of heat.

Under these circumstances, Claude ventured to indulge in the hope that he should be fortunate enough to find all living.

Sixteen-String Jack was the next to him, and he was at some little distance off.

Beyond him, again, was the form of Charles Straatt.

While in the act of crawling towards the former, Claude saw him move his arms about and then rise upon one elbow.

"Jack!" he cried, in as loud a voice as he could command, "Jack!"

The highwayman turned upon hearing his friend's voice, and looked in his face with a puzzled air.

But he soon comprehended his situation.

By a great effort he, by his comrade's assistance, sat up and looked around him.

Claude glided off towards the young prince, whom he found in a perfectly senseless state, and looking so much like death that he gave utterance to an ejaculation, which caused Jack, feeble as he was, to approach him.

But, upon placing his hand upon his heart, he could feel a slight, fluttering pulsation.

But though Claude and Jack, who were presently joined by the boatman and Tom King, tried their utmost to restore him to consciousness, they were unsuccessful.

No doubt, had they been furnished with better means, the case would have been different, but then all were so weak that they could not so much as chafe his limbs, and so promote the circulation of the blood.

The pangs of hunger and thirst, too, began to make themselves felt by those who had recovered; but though they cast their eyes all around; them, they could not see so much as a blade of grass, nor a spot of fresh water.

In fact, they had been cast upon a mere projecting piece of rock, upon which nothing grew—upon which nothing found a resting-place, and where no water, except such as fell from the sky, was ever seen.

The part, too, in which it was went against them.

Mariners invariably avoided it, because of the dangers of the sunken rocks, which grew up from the ocean bed like teeth in a shark's jaw.

Were they then preserved from a more lenient death to perish of starvation upon that rugged and barren spot?

Surely, yes, unless assistance comes, and that promptly:

Higher and higher rose the sun, and when he was in his full power the young prince recovered.

The great heat of the sun, in their exposed situation, was now found to be a serious inconvenience to them all.

But there was no place where they could shelter themselves from his burning rays.

At last the sun declined—day faded—and night once more came upon the deep.

Cold, hungry, weary, thirsty, suffering great torment from their wounds and bruises, the unfortunate party lay upon the sand.

The intense coldness of the evening was now felt to be even a greater hardship than the sun's fervency, but they were helpless, and could not shield themselves from either the one or the other.

They waited for dawn.

It was near the close of this second day that Claude Duval, as he cast his eyes around, caught sight of a white object.

Almost dreading to give any room for hope, he did not approach to any of his companions, but looked again.

It was a sail!

No longer containing the joyful intelligence, he shouted aloud.

Wearied and worn out as they were, this infused fresh life into his companions' breasts.

Faithfully they struggled to their feet, and then looked seaward, satisfied themselves that there was no mistake.

Of course the next thing now was to attract attention, and this Claude did by hastily stripping off his shirt, and

holding it by the sleeve, so that it fluttered out like a little flag.

By rare good fortune the signal was seen by those on board the vessel, and its course was altered towards them.

And then, for the first time, they thought of the unpleasant predicament they would be in if this ship, as most likely was the case, was an English one.

But prospective danger is preferable to present.

It so happened that the ship was really the French sloop of war of which the boatman had spoken.

He knew it again at once.

Animated now by hope, they waited the approach of the friendly bark, and, in less than an hour afterwards, were safe on board of it, where every attention was paid to them.

CHAPTER CCXXVIII.

DICK TURPIN AND THE ARMY REACH LONDON, AND THE FORMER PAYS A VISIT TO OLD MATTHEW, THE LANDLORD OF THE "WHITE HORSE," IN DRURY-LANE.

It is not our intention to follow, step by step, the progress of the British army back to London.

Such a recapitulation of ordinary every-day occurrences would be wearisome both to the reader and the chronicler.

The lapse of time, therefore, which it took for the army to go by forced marches from one place to the other, must be passed over in a word or two.

Major Nicholson kept a very keen eye upon Turpin and all his movements, so the highwayman was cautious to a degree accordingly.

During the march, however, nothing further occurred.

No more doubts had been expressed about the genuineness of the head. Indeed, it seemed to be taken for granted, on all hands, that it was exactly what it was represented to be.

London was reached.

Banners waved, crowds gathered, guns were fired in honour of the arrival of the commander-in-chief.

The news of the victory had, of course, preceded them, and preparations for their reception had been made upon a grand scale.

Dick Turpin, however, was fearful that some curious eye should single him out from among the throng and recognise him.

He did not forget that a very large reward was offered for his apprehension.

Therefore, upon nearing the suburbs, he contrived, in spite of the opposition of Major Nicholson, to obtain permission from the duke to leave the ranks.

The conditions under which this leave of absence was granted were these—

The head was to be left in the duke's custody.

Turpin was to be at St. James's Palace without fail at nightfall, when the head would be presented to him.

To these conditions Dick at once agreed, and faithfully promised to comply with them.

He then separated himself from the troops, and at a hand-gallop made his way into London.

After carefully thinking the matter over, he considered that his best place of refuge, and where his priceless mare, Black Bess, would be safest, was the "White Horse" in Drury-lane.

Old Matthew, he knew, would be able to furnish him with the fullest information.

He had, moreover, many contrivances for baffling the officers, should they by any chance get scent of him.

It was not without some degree of trepidation, however, that he made his way in broad daylight into the heart of London.

He shaped his course to Bloomsbury-fields, at that time fields in reality.

Here, of course, few people were met with.

Passing Montague-house, on the site of which the British Museum now stands, he was able to go in a direct line to the top of Drury Lane.

Down that unsavoury thoroughfare, then, he passed, but when he reached the corner of Prince's Street he paused.

It will hardly do, he muttered, "for me to be seen riding up to the door of the 'White Horse' in broad

daylight. I shall surely be seen, and my presence commented upon by some one. No, I will go the back way."

With these words on his lips, he turned the corner of Prince's-street, and, after going a little way, took again the first turning on his right, now called Stanhope-street.

It was at the back of, and parallel to, Drury-lane, and White Horse-yard—the name of the passage at the side of old Matthew's dwelling—connected the two.

The place is hardly wide enough to admit a man on horseback, but Dick had been before.

In a moment or two more, the strange little door in the wall—the secret of which was known only to a few—was reached.

Then he pressed upon the hidden spring and waited.

Before his summons was responded to, he had alighted and stood with his mare's bridle over his arm.

Silently the door swung open.

There stood old Matthew on the threshold.

At the first glance, he did not recognise Turpin, so greatly had his looks altered during the campaign.

But Turpin seized his hand, and, pressing it warmly, spoke.

The worthy landlord knew the voice.

That had not changed.

"Why, Dick?" he said, in the enthusiasm of the moment, almost crushing the highwayman's hand between his huge palms, "that is never you, surely. I had given up all thoughts of ever seeing you again."

"Yet here I am," replied Turpin, "safe and sound, and what is quite as much, if not more, here is Black Bess, safe and sound too."

"So she is; but don't stand there, Dick—come in, come in! I've such news to tell you. Where have you been all this long time? Come in, come in!"

The worthy old landlord bustled about as quickly as his portly old form would let him.

The secret door was opened to its full extent.

"Be quick, Dick," he cried; "I don't want any unfriendly eye to see me."

"All right, Matthew, here we are."

Dick, as he spoke, led his mare into the little square yard which has already been described in the earlier portion of this history, and then the landlord rapidly shut and carefully fastened the door.

"Now Dick, lad, where have you been? Come, tell us, and I will tell you afterwards all that I know. And where's Tom King, and how is he, and what has become of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, and?"

"Stop—stop!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "How do you think I am going to answer any of your questions, if you keep on at that rate?"

"I forgot, my lad; but you see there is so much I want to know."

"I don't doubt that, but, Matthew, my friend, let us first attend to bonny Black Bess, here. Lead the way to the stables, and when I have seen her safely disposed of, we will go indoors and have a glass together, while we talk over the past."

"Bravo! Dick, so I will. You're one of the right sort, you are, and know how to behave to a good horse when you've got one. It was always the same. The mare first and yourself afterwards."

"So it ought to be."

"As you say, so it ought to be. Now, Dick, follow me. I've got the door undone at last. Come along."

Old Matthew threw open a door as he spoke, and led the way along a passage, from which came the unmistakable odour of stables.

At the extremity of this passage was another door, which led into the stables themselves.

It was not the first time that Dick had seen them, and even Black Bess seemed to recollect, or she walked directly to the stall which she usually occupied.

Old Matthew supplied her plentifully with corn, then let her down her stall with a quantity of fresh straw.

This done, he would insist upon the highwayman accompanying him without delay into the little bar-parlour, where none but privileged guests were admitted.

On the present occasion, in order not to be disturbed, he locked the door.

From a little cupboard he produced two or three bottles containing wines and spirits of a choicer quality than any were vended in London.

These they sat down by the fireside to discuss.

Matthew, however, firmly and flatly refused to answer any questions, or impart any information, until Dick had satisfied his curiosity by telling him all that had taken place since their last parting.

To do this, Dick had to go back to the execution of Tom King—a attempted execution, rather.

Beginning, then, with his rescue, he as briefly as he could, consistently with clearness, narrated to the landlord the principal events that had taken place, ending, of course, by his presence where he was at that moment.

To the whole of the extraordinary narration old Matthew listened, with his eyes wide open with astonishment.

But, above all, was he astounded at the bold and daring plan which had hitherto been carried out so successfully of passing off a spurious head for that of the young prince.

When he learned, however, that on that very night, Turpin was going to consummate it by presenting himself before the king, and demanding the reward, he grew alarmed and tried to dissuade him from it.

The risk was immense.

But Dick was deaf to all his persuasions.

"It is no good for you to say a word, Matthew—not a bit. I have resolved upon it, and you know when I once take a thing into my head there is no turning me! Now, will you listen to me a moment?"

"What is it?"

"Will you listen?"

"To be sure I will."

"Very well, then. I have told you all that has taken place without hearing a word from you."

"I know you have."

"Then before anything more is said, you must tell me what has happened during my absence."

"Well?"

"Do you hear anything of the officers?"

Matthew smiled significantly.

"They drop in now and then."

"Still at the same game, eh?"

"Oh! yes. But if you want to know if they have been for you, they haven't. Wriggles—you know Wriggles?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, he gave me the most trouble."

"Did he?"

"Yes."

"How was that?"

"He got the idea into his head that you were concealed here somewhere, and he searched the old place from top to bottom."

"Did he?"

"Yes, and even then he was not convinced, but set men to watch, and made no end of fuss."

"All to no good?"

"All to no good!"

"Capital; and lately there have been no inquiries?"

"No. I began to grow afraid that you had departed this life, but I see here you are safe and sound."

"Yes; and now there is another point I want to be satisfied upon."

"What is it?"

"Am I much altered?"

"Very much."

"Then you think I am not in much danger of being recognised?"

"I don't know. You are almost forgotten already, I think! Such a long time has passed since you did any business. People now are not so afraid of taking a journey at night as they used to be."

"So much the better, then. I will soon let them know that Dick Turpin is alive! But come, Matthew, lend me your assistance. It is growing dusk, now, and I must be at the palace at dark."

Matthew shook his head.

"I should never run the risk, Dick, if I was you."

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

WHEN TOO LATE, DICK TURPIN FINDS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER TO HAVE TAKEN OLD MATTHEW'S ADVICE, AND THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS CARRYING A JOKE TOO FAR.

It is night.

St. James's-street and Pall-mall are a scene of the greatest possible confusion.



[THE SENTINEL MAKES AN ABORTIVE EFFORT TO PREVENT DICK TURPIN'S ESCAPE.]

These two streets, and many other subordinate ones, are choked up with numberless vehicles of every description, while the footpaths are thronged with hundreds of pedestrian spectators.

The front of the substantial-looking old palace, which has of late fallen into comparative disuse, was brilliantly illuminated.

At least our ancestors thought so, but then they never dreamed even of the invention of so wonderful an agent as gas.

All over the city, too, and especially in the more aristocratic portions of it, the windows were lighted up from cellar to roof.

Not only was this done by the upholders of the house of Hanover, who were just then in the ascendant, but also by many of those who were attached to the fortunes of the exiled and vanquished Stuarts, who wished to avoid popular ill-usage.

The assembled crowd, of course, was densest just where the carriages stopped to deposit their contents, who

had to make their way across the pavement to the entrance.

Occasionally a loud burrah or a bitter groan would arise as some popular or unpopular personage alighted and crossed into the palace.

As may be supposed, the Duke of Cumberland was just at that present moment the popular idol.

Accordingly, when his carriage drew up with a jerk, a stentorian cheer which made the whole palace ring again issued from a thousand throats.

The commander-in-chief paused a moment to return these acknowledgments by bowing deeply, and then vanished into the recesses of the building.

Within, the palace was one scene of dazzling splendour.

The whole of the aristocracy of the kingdom were present, in order to receive the victorious duke in a manner which they deemed worthy of him.

Dick Turpin—who, it must be borne in mind, was known to the duke and his officers as Mr. John Palmer—was present.

He was dressed in a style befitting the occasion, but he strove, as much as possible, to elude observation.

In this he, to a very great extent, succeeded, for, observing a little ante-chamber, which was fitted up like a refreshment-room, he entered it at once.

A massive curtain of crimson damask, with bullion fringe and tassels, hung before the entrance of it in lieu of a door.

The room was quite vacant when he entered it, so, choosing the least conspicuous seat he could, he sat himself down upon it, and waited patiently.

The hum of voices from the large outer apartment now reached his ears very faintly indeed.

"What's to be the end of this desperate adventure?" he asked himself, musingly. "Am I to meet with the same success that I have done hitherto? As Old Matthew rightly enough says, it is a fearful risk; but never mind, Dick Turpin never was the man to relinquish what he had taken in hand on account of any perils or difficulties that might present themselves."

He was silent for a minute or two, for a louder noise than usual came from the saloon.

But, whatever might have been the cause of it, it was quickly over.

"I ought to arrange a retreat," he added, "in case I should be discovered. That will only be acting like a skilful general when leading his forces into the field. It will be my best course to set about that at once."

With this conviction on his mind, he rose, and, crossing the refreshment room, pushed aside the crimson curtain, and entered the saloon.

It was much fuller than it was when he had left it, and therefore he had all the better chance of doing what he wished to do unperceived.

Gradually, then, he paced round the room.

He came at length to the doors, through which fresh guests came streaming in.

A crowd of menials were about it.

He shook his head and passed on.

"No, no," he said; "if the worst comes to the worst, and I have to make a flying retreat from this gorgeous apartment, I shall stand no chance of getting free if I try to pass there."

The windows of this room were all upon one side of it.

They were small, like all the windows in the old palace, but they were many in number.

Without exception, they were all composed of little diamond-like panes, set in a framework of lead.

Some of these little panes were of stained glass, and so placed as to form curious devices.

Dick strove to look through several of these windows, in order to see what kind of place it was into which they looked, but he was each time unsuccessful.

Having, in a short time, made himself perfectly familiar with the different bearings of the room, he felt himself more at his ease.

Just at this moment, however, some one touched him lightly on the arm.

Dick turned like lightning, and then saw it was one of the duke's personal attendants.

This individual did not speak, but merely beckoned with his finger tips for Turpin to accompany him.

This the highwayman did not hesitate to do.

In a few seconds he reached the duke's side, who made a motion for him to remain where he was.

Then, before he had time to look around him, even to see by what persons he was encompassed, some large folding-doors at the further extremity of the saloon were thrown open, disclosing another apartment of similar appearance beyond it.

Towards this, then, all bent their course.

Upon a nearer approach, Dick saw that this was where the king intended to receive his guests.

He was seated in a massive high-backed arm-chair, which was placed upon a dais.

Upon his fat and vacant-looking face appeared a smile of complacent satisfaction.

It was the first time Dick had ever breathed the atmosphere of royalty, and so, as a matter of course, it oppressed him.

In what way to comport himself he knew not.

But yet he did not appear awkward.

He kept a watchful eye upon the behaviour of those nearest to him, and demeaned himself accordingly.

One by one the assemblage made their obeisance to their sovereign, and then the duke had several flattering compliments passed upon him for the manner in which he had conducted the campaign, and the promptitude with which he had crushed out this formidable rebellion.

It was then that the death of the Young Pretender was more particularly spoken of.

Now Turpin felt that his time was coming.

He could not control a slight beating at his heart.

The ghastly and terrible-looking head had been preserved from the ravages of decay by having been kept in spirits of wine during the march from Edinburgh to London.

Now, however, it had been carefully dried, in order that the king might gratify his curiosity by looking at it.

After that, it had been agreed it should be stuck upon a pike over Temple-bar.

The large, or rather immense reward which had been offered for this object, made every one present regard Turpin with the utmost interest and attention when he stood forward, by the duke's command, to assert his claim to it.

Now was the critical moment.

Was this audacious imposition to be successful?

Was the Young Pretender, after all, destined to have the laugh against his enemies?

We shall see.

Scarcely had Turpin taken the head in his hand, and standing before the king, commenced the recital of how he came to be in possession of it, than a strange hubbub arose.

The courtly guests looked about them with dismay.

An angry look came over the king's face.

But, despite of this, the hubbub increased, and came nearer and nearer.

Probably only one person there present could give a guess as to what it meant.

And that was Dick Turpin, whose eyes had suddenly encountered the gaze of Major Nicholson.

Upon the face of this individual was an expression of triumph.

Simultaneously with his observing this circumstance, a chair, which came from no one knew whither, was pushed forward.

Then a man, in a state of frantic excitement, which blinded him to all notions of etiquette, sprang into it.

This individual, upon whom the glance of all centred, was short and thin.

He was attired as a police-officer.

As if still further to show his authority, he held up at full length in his right hand a little staff with a gilt crown to it, such, indeed, as was carried by constables as an emblem of authority.

"Seize him!" he cried. "Murder! It's all a sham! The Pretender's alive, and has escaped! That is Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Seize him! Down with him! A thousand pounds reward! Murder!"

To paint the effect which these few words produced upon the guests in the saloon, is quite out of our power.

While he uttered the first few sentences, a dead silence ensued.

But that only lasted while they were dominated by surprise.

It was succeeded by a kind of roar, which quickly rose into a shout.

A rush was made in the direction where Turpin stood.

The chair upon which the officer stood was overturned.

He was thrown to the ground before he could complete his ejaculatory denunciation.

But he was quickly up again.

CHAPTER CCXXX.

DICK TURPIN IS FORCED TO FLY THROUGH THE PALACE FOR HIS LIFE.

THE king started to his feet.

Swords were drawn.

Fierce cries uttered.

It may seem strange, but we are not afraid to say that the highwayman, who assuredly was in the greatest danger, was the calmest and most self-possessed of all.

It arose in a great measure from the fact that he anticipated the catastrophe.

But so suddenly had the officer sprang up upon the chair, and so rapidly had he spoken, that it was not until he was fairly overturned that Dick tried to fly.

His position was desperate.

He was surrounded.

Hemmed in on all sides.

His first impulse was to get rid of the head, which had now become merely an incumbrance to him.

Swinging it once round his head, he flung it into the face of his foes.

Then, with the quickness of thought, he drew his sword from its sheath.

It was not the trusty broadsword he was accustomed to use, but a rapier.

He glared about him.

To get to the windows was impossible.

The crowd of excited guests was between him and them, and to attempt to force a passage through so compact a body could only result in his own death or capture.

Some other outlet to the room must be found.

There were but two others.

One was the large folding doors leading into the outer saloon.

The other a small private door leading to the state apartments, through which the king had come.

To this Dick at once resolved to make his way.

He reached it at a bound.

A couple of yeomen of the guard stood on duty beside it, and, upon seeing him approach, they presented their long halberds at his breast.

But, with a blow from both arms, he dashed these aside.

Ere they could recover their cumbrous weapons, he gained the door.

He did not attempt to unfasten it, but flung himself with all his force against it.

There was a crash.

The door gave way.

A yell from the rear echoed the performance of this feat.

Dick stumbled when the door gave way, and almost fell.

Luckily, however, he preserved his footing.

A quarter of the force he used would have been sufficient.

Not stopping, however, he looked anxiously around to see what kind of place he was in.

It was a long and dimly-lighted corridor, from which opened a number of doors.

Willingly enough would he have tried to take shelter in one or other of the rooms into which they led, but his pursuers were too close upon his heels for such a manoeuvre to be successful.

The confusion and excitement in the saloons were terrific.

The scene altogether had been too much for the royal nerves, so the king had sunk down in a swoon after springing to his feet.

Several rushed forward to his assistance, vociferating loudly.

But by far the greater number hastened to pursue the audacious highwayman.

Foremost among these were Major Nicholson and the police-officer.

But Dick had got a start, though not much of a one, and did not allow himself to be frightened by the noise his pursuers made.

At the end of the corridor was another door.

It was ajar.

To dart through it was the work of a moment.

He noticed, too, that the fastenings were on the inner side.

He slammed the door to at once.

Then turned the key, which happened to be in the lock. Then shot two brass bolts into their sockets.

Frail as the door was, and little strength as would be required to force it from its hinges, yet it answered one good purpose.

It enabled Dick to get out of sight of his pursuers.

Turning round, he found himself in a small ante-room, or vestibule.

Opposite was an open door, leading into a larger apartment.

Two steps brought him to it.

As he put his hand upon the knob to close this second door, his pursuers arrived at the first.

Some heavy blows were struck.

What followed next he did not stay to see, but closed this second door.

From afar off he could hear various sounds, which showed that the alarm was spreading, and would soon become general.

A bell was tolling furiously.

The kettledrums of the soldiers on duty at the palace sent forth their deafening notes.

"This is a serious affair," said Dick. "It strikes me, unless I find some way out of the palace, and that very quickly, I shall be captured."

He was now in a large and magnificently-furnished room.

It was illuminated by a chandelier, carrying some hundreds of wax candles.

Now, however, only two or three of these were lighted, so that the gloom was only partially dispelled.

Dick took this in at a glance, for, of course, he did not stay to make any examination.

It was vacant.

There was then a loud crash.

The first door had given way.

A moment.

And then his foes were at the second, and, by the vigorous manner in which they attacked it, Dick saw that would not hold up two minutes.

Running, therefore, the full length of this apartment, he passed into another.

Beyond this was another.

In fact, he was in one of those long suites of rooms of which there are so many in St. James's Palace.

He had no resource but to keep on, for his pursuers pressed so closely after him.

Every door, however, through which he passed, he fastened as well as his haste would permit.

Having at length gained a little upon them, he stopped and drew aside one of the curtains before the windows.

This he found was an injudicious action.

He could just see very dimly what was beyond.

The window looked into an open paved court, which was thronged with people in a state of the greatest possible excitement.

From the loud cry which arose as soon as he drew back the curtain, he felt sure he must have been seen, and that he had given his enemies a clue to his whereabouts.

To have attempted escape from that window would have been madness.

Probably the time that he paused to draw aside the curtain and look out did not amount to a minute, but yet it enabled his pursuers to gain the door of the room in which he was.

They were expeditious.

There was a reason for this, but Turpin did not know it.

They had provided themselves with efficient instruments, by which they were able to demolish the doors almost as fast as Dick could fasten them.

He had no resource but to continue his flight through the suite of rooms.

These must come to an end some time, though they really seemed interminable.

Surely never before that night, and never since, had there been such a racket and confusion as there was then.

In a few moments, however—after, indeed, passing through two more rooms—the end was reached, and Dick emerged into another corridor, running at right angles to the course he had been taking.

The last door, however, he could not fasten, for the bolts and lock were upon the inner side.

Looking right and left down this corridor, for it stretched equally in both directions, he could see no one.

"I will turn to the left," he said. "Perhaps a little further on I shall come to a staircase, down which to force my way."

With these words in his mind, rather than upon his lips, Dick Turpin ran along the corridor, in the direction he had named.

Ere he had proceeded many yards, however, loud shouts, the clashing of weapons, and the hurried trampling of feet

behind him, gave notice that his pursuers once more had him in full view.

Still Turpin ran on.

He was afraid to stop and make the attempt to gain one of the many apartments which opened to the right and left of him, lest it should enable them to gain too much upon him.

It was a strange race.

With unabated speed, however, the highwayman kept on.

The long, low corridor was only dimly lighted by a few oil lamps, placed in the hands of statues at long intervals.

To a certain extent, this was an inconvenience, but it advantaged him in this way.

Those in pursuit could not see him so easily as they would otherwise have done.

And now, in the distance, Dick fancied he can discern the termination of the long passage.

Perhaps there was the much wished for staircase.

But, if so, he was destined never to reach it.

Fresh sounds suddenly greet his ears.

They come from before him.

Another moment, and he sees the flashing of lights, the murmur of voices, the rush of feet.

A cry of triumph comes from those in the rear, who press onward with greater eagerness.

It is echoed by a groan from the highwayman, as, thus placed between two parties, he comes to a halt.

To go on would only be to throw himself into their grasp.

What is to be done?

To stand still is to be captured.

There is no hope of being able to force a passage through either those in advance or those in the rear.

Their numbers are too great, and they are too well armed.

CHAPTER CCXXXI.

DICK TURPIN ESCAPES FROM THE PALACE, BUT IS MADE PRISONER BY A SENTINEL.

DESPAIRINGLY, Dick Turpin, the bold highwayman, turned his eyes around him.

He dashes the heavy drops of perspiration from his face, which, trickling down from his forehead, obscure his vision.

His drawn sword is in his hands, and, for a second, it looks as though he was going to turn at bay, and fight his numerous foes.

But that idea is too preposterous to hold place in his mind.

A door was near him.

He did not know it might, if he passed through it, so far from aiding his escape, ensure his capture.

But the risk must be run.

His foes are close upon him.

He hears their swords clash.

He hears them cry to him to surrender.

Unheeding them, however, he grasped the handle of the door, and tried to enter.

Alas!

The door was fast upon the inner side.

A firm, heavy door it seemed.

Could he force it?

He knew that if he stayed where he then was, before his heart could pulsate thirty times his foes would be upon him.

He drew back to the opposite side of the corridor.

As he did so, there was the sharp report of a pistol.

He staggered.

No doubt he would have been shot at earlier, but none of those in chase were provided with firearms with the exception of the police-officer.

He had only one, and he reserved that until he could almost make certain of his aim.

Dick was hit.

But only slightly.

Although he staggered, he did not pause.

He rushed across the corridor, and flung himself with might and main.

It cracked.

It gave way.

He could not stop himself, but fell heavily with it to the floor.

Before his mind, however, was so palpable an idea of his danger, that he was on his feet again instantly.

But his foes were on the threshold.

"Surrender!" they cried. "Surrender, and your life will be spared. Surrender! It is impossible for you to escape."

"Never!" shouted Dick, hoarsely. "Never!"

The room into which he had just made his way, was almost in total darkness.

From the surrounding obscurity, however, he could just distinguish the outlines of the window.

Many of his pursuers had provided themselves with lights, but those who carried them were in the rear.

They did not wait for these to come up with them, but dashed into the chamber, crying out for Dick to surrender.

But this was a thing Dick Turpin determined never to do with life.

There was the window.

He knew not how high it might be from the ground.

He knew not what sort of a place there might be beyond.

But he knew it was the open air, because he could just distinguish the night sky.

Therefore, with the one word of "Never!" upon his lips, he made a terrific spring forward.

He concentrated in it the whole of his remaining energies.

He mounted on the broad window-sill.

Then flung himself, head-foremost, through the casement.

There was a tremendous crash of broken glass.

A wild cry from the king's guests, who were amazed at the boldness of this desperate feat.

Just then, those with the lights arrived upon the threshold.

A general rush was made to the window, from which came a strong current of cold air, that threatened to extinguish the lights.

All that could be seen, however, was a large hole in the very centre of the casement.

Framework and glass had both disappeared.

For a moment all stood still with astonishment, but, recovering themselves, they ran out of the room.

"This way—this way!" some one had cried. "He has leaped into the garden, and cannot escape. This way will take you to it. We shall find him lying lamed upon the ground, for the fall is enough to kill him. This way, all! We have him safe enough now."

But in this they were disappointed.

The communication between the eye and the brain is instantaneous.

When Dick had jumped on to the window-sill, and sprang through the casement, he caught a glimpse of the tops of some trees waving near him.

This at once made him aware that he was a considerable distance from the ground.

And also that ground would be of a soft character.

Had it been otherwise, however, he could not have halted.

He plunged through the window.

The mere weight of his body would have been sufficient to have shattered it to atoms.

He held his breath as he fell.

Then, with a sudden shock, he reached the ground.

But, fortunately for him, he happened to alight upon a bed of soft mould.

He fell, too, on his hands and knees.

For full three moments, though, he was deprived of consciousness.

Although the alarm appeared to be so general, there was no one at all about this spot.

Had there been, his capture would have been certain, for he could not have raised a hand to defend himself.

His senses soon returned to him.

Before he ventured to stir, he listened.

Various sounds indicative of alarm, and such as he had previously heard, still reached his ears, but they did not seem to be particularly near that spot.

When he took the leap, it was with the idea of escaping immediate capture, but now the hope of being able to get clear off began to fill his mind.

But clearly there was no time to lose.

He struggled to his feet.

He was bruised and shaken, but no bones had been broken.

He was in pain—great pain—and his left ankle-joint seemed out of place.

Ricked is the colloquial word for it.

This, he was aware, would soon pass off.

He glanced round him, in order to take in his position.

The garden into which he had fallen seemed to be of very great extent.

Behind him was the palace.

Before him, sharply defined against the night sky, was a wall.

What was on the other side of that wall?

He looked around him once more.

It must be St. James's Park.

Could he once get into that large inclosure, surely he should stand a chance of baffling those who were in chase of him.

In a moment, then, now that he had resolved upon a particular course of action, he hastened to the garden wall.

It was, he found upon nearing it, only a little more than six feet in height.

To scale it, therefore, would not be a matter of much difficulty.

He raised his arms, in order to pull himself up, but a sudden pain forced him to drop them again.

In his fall, he had almost forgotten the wound he had received from the pistol of the police-officer while in the corridor.

But now he was disagreeably made sensible of it.

The bullet had struck him in the top part of his shoulder, near its junction with the neck.

He rapidly put up his hand to ascertain the extent of the injury.

It was slight.

There was, though, what most would have considered a serious and ugly gash.

The pain he felt arose, more than anything, from a portion of his apparel having stuck in it, and now that bleeding began again, he felt scarcely anything of it.

Once more, then, he placed his hands upon the edge of the wall, and, by the muscular force contained in his arms, drew himself up until his breast was on a level with it.

To get his legs up was easy enough.

And now those who had left the chamber to make their way into the garden, arrived.

Their numbers had considerably augmented, and they had, moreover, provided themselves with torches, which threw a rude light around.

They perceived Dick almost instantly, before he could lower himself from the wall, and they made a rush in his direction.

But, ere they could accomplish more than half the distance, Dick had descended.

Only to fall into a fresh peril.

Directly his feet touched the ground, he felt something hard pressed against his body, and a voice cried—

"Stand, or you are a dead man! If you attempt to move, I fire!"

It was a soldier who spoke.

Dick could distinguish his form, for his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness.

He was one of the sentinels who were deputed to keep guard round the royal residence.

The hard object which was pressed against Dick's breast, was the muzzle of his musket.

He had seen him on the wall, and, as he thought, had him secure.

But he little knew the man he had to deal with.

When any one feels that his life depends upon his actions, it is wonderful how much more can he do than under less pressing circumstances.

Had some trifling punishment only been the result which followed his capture, Dick would then and there have surrendered.

But he was well aware that, should he ever be taken prisoner, his life would be the penalty.

But that touch was not destined to be given.

It was a hazardous experiment, but, with the swiftness of thought, Dick seized the barrel of the gun and turned it aside.

He was only just in time.

The sentinel had seen the movement, and prepared to fire.

The highwayman was quickest.

Had a person stood there, however, and been a spectator of the affair, he would have declared that Dick seized the muzzle and the soldier drew the trigger at precisely the same moment.

In reality this was not so.

A space of time—certainly infinitesimal—intervened, and it was during this period that Dick turned it aside.

The bullet flattened itself against the wall within a foot of him.

The recoil of the weapon made it for a moment unsteady in the sentry's grasp.

Dick was prepared for this, and took advantage of it to wrest the musket from his grasp.

Then, still holding it by the barrel, but shifting one hand further along it, he swung it with great swiftness round his head, aiming a terrific blow at his opponent as he did so.

But the man knew what was coming, and drew back to avoid the stroke.

He did not go far enough.

The butt of the gun, instead of reaching his head, as the highwayman intended, alighted on his shoulder.

But, such was the vigour of the blow, that, with a yell of pain, he sank to the ground.

Dick's blood was up, and well it might be, taking all circumstances into consideration, and he did what he would not in a moment of less excitement have thought of doing.

He struck the man again.

This time he fell like an inanimate body upon the ground.

The struggle was a very brief one, but when Dick looked round, he found his enemies were very close upon him.

A small door in the garden-wall, which he had not previously noticed, was thrown open, and the disorderly throng, worked up to a pitch of the greatest possible excitement, poured forth.

They were this time in greater numbers than ever.

He turned and fled.

The musket, which had once already rendered him such good service, he would not abandon.

It was unloaded, but, used like a club, it would be a very effective weapon at close quarters.

As he crossed that open space in the park, known ever since the reign of Charles II. as "the Mall," he heard the loud clear tones of a bugle rise on the night air.

What this meant, he knew not, but scarcely had the echoes died away, than its notes were taken up by another in the distance.

It seemed to be at the Horse Guards.

It was a signal of some sort or other, for it was taken up, by another, this time in another direction.

For a brief space Dick was at a loss to think what this signified, and then he muttered—

"I have it. I know now. Confound it, my troubles are not half over. They have communicated with the soldiers at the different gates, who will now refuse to let any one pass out."

Dick hit exactly upon the real state of the case.

There were then, as now, several gates by which St. James's Park could be left or entered.

At each of these gates were posted soldiers as sentinels. The bugle call was understood by them as a command to close the gates and allow no one to pass out.

Dick Turpin was in a cage—a large one, it is true, but, nevertheless, it was a cage, and one in which he stood a good chance of being caught, unless luck befriended him in some extraordinary and unlooked for manner.

The park was dark, and the many trees that grew in it threw deep shadows all around.

For him to keep out of the way of those who were pursuing him with lights was no difficult matter, because their exact position was always known to him.

But with them the case was quite altered.

The torches only made the darkness appear darker, and confused their eyes.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

DICK TURPIN DISPOSES OF THE SENTINEL, AND RECOVERS UPON A PLACE OF REFUGE.

ONE touch upon the trigger of that musket, and Dick Turpin would have been a dead man.

Unless just within the sphere of their rays, Dick could not be seen.

The only thing that could guide them was the sound of his footsteps.

All had paused, as if actuated by one impulse, when they came to the sentinel, who lay upon the ground with every appearance of death.

"This gave Dick a slight advantage, and he availed himself of it.

After crossing the Mall, he came to the tall iron palings which surround the green inclosure in which the piece of ornamental water is situated.

He had some trouble in climbing over these, for he had no place upon which he could rest his feet.

But he overcame the obstacle.

The Mall was hard and dry, so that no trace of his footsteps could be seen.

But in the inclosure it was soft.

He went onwards, however, until he came to a gravel path, changing his course a dozen times as he found his foes were on his track.

One of these gravel paths brought him out at the very verge of the piece of water.

The clumsy iron suspension-bridge which now connects the opposite shores of this pretty lake, and takes off all its beauty, is of modern construction.

At the time of which we are writing there was no such contrivance.

"What shall I do?" asked Dick of himself, as he stood breathless and exhausted at the brink of the still waters, and fixing his eyes upon his pursuers as he spoke. "What shall I do?"

A dreadful sensation of weakness came over him.

He felt as though he should fall to the ground.

But, by a strong mental effort, he recovered himself.

"It is my wound," he said; "and yet it seems to have bled scarcely any. How is it?"

He put his hand upon it, and found his clothes all round about sopping wet.

It had bled more profusely than he imagined, and the crimson fluid had been absorbed by his apparel.

"I must stop this," he muttered, "or, in a little while I shall fall helpless into their hands. I must be quick, too."

While speaking, he pulled off his cravat.

He tore it into halves.

One he soaked in the cold clear water at his feet, and then bound as tightly as he could over the wound.

The other he likewise soaked, and tied tightly around his ankle, which pained him excessively.

While doing this he was all the time careful to keep an eye upon the movements of those who were in pursuit of him.

They had wandered off into quite another direction to that in which he was.

Doubtless they had been misled by some accidental sound, which they took to be indicative of his presence.

This just afforded him breathing time.

Though, in comparison with some of the other parks, St. James's is not a very large place, yet it extends over a good-sized piece of ground, and it can easily be imagined how Turpin managed to elude them.

But that would only be at night.

They had only to keep the guard at the gates, and when the morning came, he would be seen and hunted down easily.

"What shall I do?" asked Dick again. "I think I will cross the water. I shall at least have an obstacle between them which they will not cross in a moment."

This was true.

To have skirted the lake, however, would have taken him some time.

He was an excellent swimmer.

Therefore, without hesitation, he committed himself to the water, taking the utmost care not to make a splash that would betray his whereabouts.

It did not require many long, vigorous strokes to carry him to the opposite bank.

The immersion, however, did him good.

It cooled his heated body, and allayed the smarting of his wound.

It seemed to clear his brain, too, for when he stood up again on the shore, and shook as well as he could the moisture from his clothing, he experienced, not only a

fresh accession of energy, but a new idea darted into his mind.

"The haunted house," he said. "The haunted house. Why did I not recollect that before, and make my way for it at once? Never mind, it is not now too late. The haunted house in the Birdcage-walk will afford me a secure refuge, provided I can gain the shelter of its roof unobserved."

He ran forward as he spoke, and cleared the palings dividing the inclosure from the road he had named, and which extends from Bridge-street, Westminster, to Buckingham Palace.

Along one side of this road—for such it is, though called somewhat strangely Birdcage-walk—is a row of substantially-built palatial-looking residences.

A hundred and twenty years ago, however, it was a much more fashionable place of residence than it is now.

It was one of these dwellings to which Turpin alluded.

He could remember how for years back it had been shut up and allowed to go to ruin.

From time to time some adventurous person, tempted by the lowliness of the rent, had taken up his residence there.

But their tenancy was never of long duration.

At last it came to be looked upon as unfit for human habitation.

It was this which first depreciated the value of the other houses contiguous to it, and they have never recovered their former status of respectability.

Strange stories had at one period been current about a horrible murder that had been committed there, but, in the lapse of time, the particulars had almost been forgotten, though the house stood there—a deserted ruin, as a perpetual memento of it.

CHAPTER CCXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN TAKES REFUGE IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE IN BIRDCAGE-WALK.

By this time the reader of this history ought to know Dick Turpin well enough to be aware that he was not the sort of man to have any dread of ghosts and spectres.

He feared no man living, and it was not likely he should fear one dead.

He set the whole story of the house being haunted to some ridiculous tale or other.

Whether he was right or not, we shall very quickly see.

He looked up and down the broad road, as well as the darkness would permit him.

No one was in sight.

Then he looked back in the direction he had just come.

Those who had so pertinaciously followed him, had penetrated the inclosure, and were standing on the bank of the lake, as nearly as possible at the spot where he had plunged into it.

Perhaps they had managed, in some way, to get upon his track.

He could see the reflection of their torches in the water.

This warned him to be speedy.

Crossing the road, he looked up at the houses, to find the one of which he was in search.

All of these dwellings had gardens between them and the park palings.

Dick turned a little to the left, or in the direction of Storey's-gate.

He soon found the house for which he looked.

He gave a sigh of relief as he did so, for within the last few seconds the disagreeable idea had occurred to him that, perhaps, during his long absence from London, the house had either been pulled down or tenanted.

But no, there it was, dimly revealed in the darkness, and presenting precisely the same appearance as it had done when he saw it last.

He paused before the little gate, which, like the palings, was composed of iron rods, with wood at the back to shut out the vulgar gaze.

Dick placed his left foot upon the rusty lock, and clambered over easily.

Then crept stealthily along a path, paved with flag-stones, which led directly to the mansion.

For it to be a safe place of refuge for him, he must leave no indications of any one having entered it.

But how was this to be managed?

He commenced a patient examination, convinced that, for a minute or two, at least, he had nothing to fear from his pursuers.

This examination, however, was not very assuring. Dilapidated as the place appeared, he found upon a close approach, that every part of it was firmly secured to prevent any one from gaining ingress.

In the lower windows the panes of glass were every one demolished, but they were defended on the inner side by strong iron bars, too closely placed together to allow anyone to squeeze between them.

Dick caught hold of one, and tried to wrench it from its socket, but the effort was a vain one, it was as immovable as a rock.

Time was passing.

There was a door leading into the lower part of the premises—the kitchen, most probably.

He had tried this before and found it fast, but he was now driven to it as a kind of forlorn hope.

He tried to shake it, and partially succeeded, but there was ample evidence to show that it was firmly fastened on the inner side.

He had the musket with him, for he knew its value too well to relinquish it.

With it he could, no doubt, have battered down the door, but that was out of the question.

Not only would the sound betray him to his pursuers, but it would call the attention of the people in the neighbouring houses.

He looked upward, but he could see no chance there of accomplishing his object.

The windows were all provided with large shutters, made somewhat in the shape of Venetian blinds.

"No," he said, "the door is my only chance. Curses on this delay! It was what I never expected."

As he spoke, he felt the door all over with his hand.

In doing so, he discovered something which had escaped his previous observation.

Near the upper portion were two panes of glass; or rather, there had been, for now very little of the glass remained.

The holes were small, but Turpin immediately resolved to try to crawl through one of them.

His first proceeding was to knock away all the jagged pieces of glass as gently as possible with the butt end of the musket.

Next, to climb through.

But this was almost an impossibility.

He put his hands through first, and then his head.

This was all well and good, but when it came to his shoulders there was the difficulty.

By wriggling about, however, and moving one side at a time, he managed, at the expense of his clothes and his skin, to crawl completely through the aperture.

No one would have believed it possible, and few, save a practised acrobat would have attempted such a feat.

Dick rose to his feet as quickly as he could, and then, going to the hole, removed those portions of his clothing that clung to the points of glass.

The kitchen—if kitchen it was—into which he had thus surreptitiously made his way, was in the profoundest darkness.

When he held up his hand before his eyes it was invisible.

"What will be my best plan now, I wonder?" he muttered, as he stood near the door. "Shall I try to get out of the front of the mansion at once, or shall I stand a better chance if I stay here, where I am, until the pursuit after me abates?"

This was rather a knotty point.

But, after a little reflection, and duly deliberating the matter, he came to the conclusion that it would be best to try and leave the premises at once.

Many a bold heart would have fluttered at finding themselves in such a place as Dick was, and surrounded by so much silence and darkness—two things which have so powerful an influence over the imagination.

Even he, however, brave as he was, did not feel altogether comfortable, and he kept every now and then uttering his thoughts aloud, so oppressive did the silence become.

Which way to turn, in order to find an outlet to the room, he had not the remotest idea.

However, he projected the musket before him, so as to

avoid coming into contact with any obstacle, and moved his feet carefully across the floor, taking care not to move one until he had a safe resting-place for the other. He had started with his back to the door, and endeavoured to make his way in as straight a line as possible.

After taking about twenty steps, the barrel of the musket struck against some object, which, upon closer observation, he found to be the wall.

By continuing along this, and maintaining the same caution as heretofore, he judged that he should before long come to the outlet for which he sought.

Nor was he mistaken in his supposition.

He did come to a door. But it was fast.

Inside the house, he was not likely to stand upon so much ceremony as he did out, when he wanted to conceal his entrance.

He drew the rapier from its sheath, and inserted its fine point in the crevice.

He continued to work it in gently, until the strong part of the blade was reached.

Then he bore his weight upon the hilt, using it in the manner of a crowbar.

The door cracked.

He repeated the pressure, and then the door swung open.

But he lost his rapier, for the blade snapped off close to its junction with the handle.

He did not care so much for that, as he had another effective weapon in his hands, and as it had already performed its modicum of service.

The door creaked open.

The same pitchy darkness was beyond.

"There ought to be some stairs somewhere about here," said Turpin. "I wonder whether I shall be able to find them?"

This seemed highly problematical.

By dint of a good deal of searching about with the musket-barrel, he succeeded in finding them.

Then he cautiously commenced their ascent.

As he went higher and higher, he found it grew lighter, and on arriving at the top, he saw the source from whence the light proceeded.

He had reached the entrance hall of the mansion, the front door of which opened into a street running parallel with Bird Cage-walk.

Over this door, which was a very large one, was a fan-light, thickly coated with dirt.

But, nevertheless, a few faint rays of the night-light found their way through it.

At the sides of the door, too, were two long, narrow windows, and through these light also came.

Contrasted with the kitchen below, this place appeared quite light, though any one just coming into it would have thought the reverse.

Dick could see about him with tolerable ease, and a certain feeling of curiosity, which he found impossible to repress, made him gaze all around to take in as well as he could its general appearance.

The hall was broad, but the ceiling was low, and thus took off in a great measure the imposing appearance which it should have had.

On his left hand, and facing the door, was a spacious staircase conducting to the upper stories.

"It looks a remarkably fine place," said Dick. "What a shame for it to be abandoned in the way I have known it to be! I wish I had a light. I would make an examination of it from top to bottom."

Dick's curiosity was strongly roused, and it looked as though he was half inclined to undertake it without a light, for he added—

"If I go upstairs and look out of one of the back-room windows, I shall be able to see all over the park, and find what my foes are about, and by going to the front I shall know whether there is any one there on the look-out for me. I'll do it, and at the same time gratify the longing I feel to make an attempt at discovering the mysteries of this haunted house."

Having come to this determination, he went to the foot of the stairs, and commenced ascending them.

But, before he had reached the first landing, he heard a sound which made him immediately pause.

Then hastily ascend the few remaining stairs, and crouch down in the corner out of sight.

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

THE PRESENCE OF DICK TURPIN IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE TURNS OUT TO BE A FORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE FOR THE YOUNG, INNOCENT, AND GOOD.

A KEY rattled in the lock of the front door.

That was the sound which had attracted Dick's attention.

What could it mean?

Who could it be, at that lonely and mysterious hour, that was about to seek an entrance to that ill-omened dwelling?

Of course, the question was one out of Dick's power to answer.

But, be it whom it might, it was no stranger.

The key, however, was obstinate, and would not turn at first.

Upon a second trial, the lock shot back with a snap which echoed and re-echoed through the lonely building in a startling manner.

The door was thrown open.

Dick ventured to stretch his head over the balusters, in order to see who was about to enter.

They were three men.

Dick could only just distinguish the outlines of their figures in the deep gloom.

One was tall and stout, and attired in a long riding-cloak, which reached from his neck to his knees, thus concealing all traces of his form.

On his head was a large felt hat, with a slouching brim.

Turpin had a better opportunity of observing him than he did the other two.

It was this individual who had unlocked the door, and been the first to enter.

He stood to hold the door open, and take the key out of the lock, and it was while he was thus engaged that Dick had an opportunity of studying his appearance and manner.

The other two men were dressed in a very ordinary costume.

By their behaviour he could tell they were lower in degree than the one in the cloak.

With increasing interest Dick looked down.

The door was closed.

At the same instant a voice said, in suppressed tones, the one word—

"Light!"

No reply was made to this command, verbally, at all events, but directly afterwards Turpin saw one of the men produce something from his pocket, which proved to be a dark lantern.

A broad bright beam of light came through the lens, and fell upon the wall.

It revealed as well the countenance of one of the men.

Villain was visibly impressed upon it.

The intense desire which Dick felt to know what could be the motive of their visit, predominated over everything else.

He forgot the curiosity which he had felt to explore the gloomy mansion.

He forgot the danger through which he had just passed, and that with which he was threatened.

His presence in that house could not fail to be one of great peril.

He could not tell at what moment his pursuers might learn where he had taken shelter, and they could surround it in such a manner as to make escape utterly impossible.

A house would be a very different place to a large open space like the part.

But, as we have said, he quite forgot all about that, and only remembered what was taking place in the hall down stairs.

When the man who carried the dark lantern unlocked it, he held it in such a manner that the greatest part of the light fell upon the staircase.

Then the one in the long riding-cloak stepped forward, and began to ascend the stairs.

The two men followed him at a short but respectful distance.

As soon as he perceived this movement, Dick hastened to go still higher.

Some thick substance seemed to be upon the stairs, which had the effect of deadening the sound of his footsteps.

In this way he proceeded up two flights, and commenced a third, when he perceived the three men pause upon the landing below him.

He stopped, of course.

He did not turn, it must be understood, and fly precipitately, but ascended with due deliberation, so that just the same distance was preserved between himself and those who were following.

So far, he felt certain that his presence in that strange and mysterious house was unsuspected.

The three men evidently thought they had it all to themselves.

It did not take Dick long to arrive at the conclusion that they were there after no good. Every little circumstance pointed towards it.

They came there stealthily and secretly, concealing themselves under cover of the darkness.

The manner in which they ascended the stairs, pausing at every few steps to listen, showed their desire to be unheard—their presence in that lonesome place unsuspected.

On the landing at the top of the second flight of stairs, they paused.

Dick had reached a bend in the stairs just above them, and screwed himself into the smallest possible compass that he could.

It must not be forgotten that the whole place, except just where the beams from the dark lantern fell, was in the deepest darkness, so that this precaution on Dick's part was hardly necessary, and taken more from impulse than reflection.

As soon as the door was reached, the stranger in the cloak threw that garment on one side, and commenced feeling in his pocket, probably for the key.

The other two still stood in the same silent, respectful attitudes as they had before assumed, the one with the light holding it in such a manner that the principal portion of its beams fell upon the doorway near the keyhole.

At length the stranger, after a moment's search, produced the key.

When his cloak was partially displaced, it showed that the dress he wore beneath it was of the costliest description, both as regards the material used, and the manner in which it was embroidered.

Of his face Dick also obtained a transient glimpse, but only of the lower part.

The mouth, chin, and cheeks were buried in a profusion of dark hair, worn after some continental fashion then scarcely known in England.

This was the extent of his observations, for, having found the key, the cloaked stranger rather hastily and impatiently thrust it into the keyhole.

Dick heard plainly enough in the silence that was around, the creaking noise produced by the key turning in the wards of the lock.

Then the door was flung open.

Ere, however, either one of them could cross the threshold, there arose a strange wailing kind of cry.

So full of woe was it, so heart-rending, and so unexpected, that it was a thousand wonders Dick Turpin did not, by some hasty movement or ejaculation, betray his presence.

He did move slightly, but the faint sound which he made was absorbed by the cry that came from the room, or whatever it was, into which the door opened.

"Cease—cease!" said a feeble but screaming voice, "persecute me no longer. Away—away! I hear your footsteps, and the very air tells me of your loathed presence! Hence—hence! I will not listen to you. Your words are vain—quite vain! I have seen a vision in the night, and the recollection of it will make me deaf to all your urgings. Hence—hence, I say!"

"He is in one of his old fits again," remarked one of the men. "How excited he does seem. I am afraid we give him too much to eat."

"Silence!" said the stranger, in a low, stern voice.



[DICK TURPIN WITNESSES A MURDER IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.]

"Silence, both of you, and enter. I will follow."

The two men obeyed this command immediately.

Shriek after shriek arose from the lips of the person within, and who, from the words just uttered, Dick imagined to be of the male sex.

But, had it not been for this, he would scarcely have surmised it.

The voice seemed rather that of a female, and the strange shrieks, too, which floated with so horrible a cadence through the air in that deserted mansion, served in a great measure to confirm the idea.

Suddenly, however, those shrieks ceased, and the highwayman heard a few words uttered in a low tone, but he was too far off to catch their import.

Fully impressed with the idea that they had that lonely house entirely to themselves, the stranger in the cloak, when he followed his two subordinates into the chamber, did not close the door, but swung it to after him, leaving it ajar.

It was open, in fact, to a space of about three inches

Dick noticed this, for the stream of light made it very conspicuous.

With this little circumstance under his observation, as soon as he found himself unable to hear what was said, he, with all the caution he was master of, stole down the stairs.

The thick coating which lay upon them, and which had before deadened the sound of his footsteps, was nothing more nor less than dust.

The care he took was really quite unnecessary. His steps would have been quite inaudible.

It was rather a remarkable feature in Dick's disposition to feel immediately curious when anything strange or incomprehensible came under his observation.

So, on the present occasion, he lost all sense of the danger he was in, and the additional peril he was bringing on himself.

Something of a very mysterious character was taking place.

And, not only that, there were indications to show that it was of an iniquitous character likewise.

He paused for a moment on the second landing to listen, in order to make sure that he was unheard.

But, feeling tolerably assured, he crept forward to the partially-open door.

Leaning, then, upon the musket he had wrested from the sentinel, he listened with the utmost intenceness.

The deep-toned voice was still speaking.

Dick could now for certain recognise it for the tall stranger in the cloak.

The words came clearly to his ears.

"Take care, old man—take care. Do not decide hastily. Reflect upon this last chance I offer you. Bear in mind, too, that your life—and not only your life, but the life of one which you hold at ten times more value—depends upon your reply. Speak, I say. Speak. You are in my power, and what has taken place up to the present moment ought to show you the futility of struggling against the inexorable decrees of fate. Cheat yourself no longer with false hopes. Reply—reply, I say, at once!"

The deep-toned voice ceased, and Dick listened with the utmost eagerness for the reply it was so anxious to elicit.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

IN WHICH IS GIVEN SOME DETAILS OF THE MYSTERIOUS DOINGS IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"MERCY—mercy."

Those were the words that came plaintively and feebly from the lips of the person addressed.

"Answer me," cried the stranger. "Answer me at once."

"Have mercy."

"You palter with your fate, old man. Return me a direct reply. Will you comply with my conditions?"

"Conditions? What conditions?"

"You try my patience to the utmost. What have I just asked you?"

"You are my foe. I tell you I have seen a vision in the night to show me how deadly an enemy you are to me and mine."

"Pho—pho. You rave."

"No—no."

"I say you do. Dreams always go by contraries."

"But what I saw was true. I tell you, you are my enemy."

"A delusion—a delusion. So far from that, I am, could you but see it, your friend. Think of Blanche!"

"Blanche—Blanche!" shrieked the old man, with a sudden accession of vigour as soon as the name was pronounced. "Blanche—Blanche! Where is she? Tell me! Take me to her! Let me once again have the pure joy of looking into her blue eyes! Fiends, you mock me! Where is Blanche? Where is she?"

"I will tell you."

It was the tall stranger who spoke.

"You—you?"

"Even I."

"And know you where she may be found?"

"I do."

"Heaven have mercy on her, then, and shield her."

"Pho—pho. You rave. You see not clearly the aspect of affairs."

"How?"

"You ask heaven to do that which you can do yourself. Is it possible that you can have lived so many years without knowing that the machinery by which this world is set in motion, when once started, goes on and on, overcoming in its mighty revolutions all gang obstacles, and that heaven never interposes on behalf of any one who has the power of helping himself?"

"Scoffer!"

"You tire my patience. It is tried. This course to-night is but a repetition of many that have preceded it. So many that you, as well as I, must have lost all count."

"I know it."

"But I tell you, old man, that, let the after consequences be what they may, this night shall be the last. Do you understand me? The last!"

"I am thankful."

"Now you are more reasonable, but do not misunderstand me. You have two alternatives."

"Two alternatives?"

"Yes, and you are free to choose between them. Make

your own choice freely. The result will fall upon no other head than yours."

"And Blanche?"

"Ah! yes, and Blanche. Certainly on Blanche, if you are fool enough to persist in your refusal to accede to my conditions."

"Blanche! Blanche!" shrieked the old man again, for it seemed as though the pronunciation of the word drove him to a kind of frenzy. "Speak to me of her, I implore you. Oh! speak to me of her."

"If you accede to my conditions, not without."

"I tell you she is the only tie which serves to bind me to this life. Were it not for her, I should be content to die and leave this world, so full of care and trouble, to itself and those whose joy it is to live in its turmoil. But I cannot. Blanche binds my life to this poor wasted frame. I tell you, she is all that is left to remind me of the past. Save her, I stand here a wretched miserable man—the survivor of all his kindred."

"Peace—peace. We have heard all this before."

"One tie binds me!" cried the old man, with ever greater vehemence, for the interruption chafed him. "One tie, but that one is so strong and so tightly woven in my heart-strings, that the one can never be wrenched from the other. In that one tie are condensed all those which almost broke my heart to part from. I love her with my whole love."

"You say so," replied the stranger, "but prove the contrary by your actions. But, come; calm yourself, and listen to me."

"What would you say?"

"That which you have heard many times before, but which, I believe, you have listened to unheeded."

"Blanche, I say!" shrieked the old man. "Release me, fiends, and let me fly to her! Release me, I say."

A slight struggle ensued, which ceased almost as soon as it had begun.

The old man was very weak, doubtless, and with his three antagonists stood no chance.

The tall stranger spoke again.

"You shall go to Blanche," he said; "and, if you wish it, remain with her for ever. But, unless you comply with my conditions, you may make your mind easy that you will never see her more."

"I defy you and your power!"

"Reflect well ere you decide."

"I have reflected."

"And is that your decision?"

"It is."

"I trust you will change. Do you know the consequences of your refusal to my conditions?"

"I defy you."

"Old man, you must be mad—utterly insane. You know not what you say."

"Are you really so anxious to save my life?"

"I am."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I would rather not have your blood upon my hands."

"Ha! ha!"

"But, if you drive me to extremities, I shall banish the idea, and then, when you find life is ebbing from you—that it is impossible for death to be averted—then, I say, you will repent, and wish you had acted otherwise."

"Never."

"But I say you will. The workings of the human heart are no secret to me. I say again, that when it is too late, you will repent."

"It is hard to die!"

"I am glad you know it," interrupted the stranger; "and, bear in mind, that there is another who will find it equally hard. There is Blanche. Surely you have not forgotten her. Is this the strong attachment you have always professed for her? Would you obstinately die when you might live to watch over and protect her, until such time as she was able to defend herself?"

"Cease—cease."

"Why should I cease?"

"You tear my heart."

"And should it not be torn? You are blind to your own interests and the interests of one who you ought to consider far more than yourself."

"And do I not? Have I not? False villain! My intellect is not yet so stultified as to be unable to detect

your sophistry. You would glose over your own villainy. You have not said a word about that."

"This is worse than all. I have had patience with you so far, but, let me warn you, it will not be of much longer continuance. The limit will soon be reached. Will you listen to me?"

"What would you say?"

"That which it would benefit you much to hear."

"Say on, then."

"You are an old man."

"I know it."

"But few years of your span of life remain."

"I know that, too, but they are much abbreviated through your plottings."

"Be calm!"

"I am calm."

"Seemingly. Let me entreat you to cast away all excitement. It cannot be productive of aught but harm."

"I am calm, I tell you!"

The fretful, peevish tone in which these words were uttered, but ill concealed the excitement beneath them—ready to break forth at the first opportunity.

"I will take you at your word! At first it was my intention to recapitulate the whole of the facts, but that would be most tedious and unnecessary. I am determined to have an answer at once! And upon that answer will depend whether you go from this house a free man, at liberty to do what you think fit. To once more have *Blanche* restored to you, or whether your life pays the forfeit, and hers also!"

"Monster!"

"Be calm!"

"Calm? Who could be calm while smarting under wrongs so flagrant as mine are?"

"Be calm, I say, and answer me. Do you know what the conditions are?"

"I do."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"That is well."

"At least, you have told them to me. You would have me assign my lands and inheritance to you, and in return, to have my daughter *Blanche* restored to me."

"To be sure. You are quite right. And why should you refuse?"

"Why should I refuse?"

"Yes."

"For my own sake, or rather, I should say, for my daughter's."

"A wicked and selfish plea."

"Wicked and selfish?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"How so! You know the history of the past as well as I do."

"Agreed; but that knowledge does not show me that I am either wicked or selfish."

"And I do. There is that little difference between us. Who was it first turned my father's heart against me, and caused me to be deprived of that which was lawfully my own?"

"Your own evil deeds, and more evil passions."

"False!"

"It is true," said the old man, in louder tones, "we are brothers, but, thank heaven, the same mother did not bear us. Mine died, and when our common father took another bride, he little dreamt that he was warning a serpent in his bosom, but so it was—so it was."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

THE FLOT BECOMES A LITTLE CLEARER, BUT DICK IS ANXIOUS TO HEAR STILL MORE.

FEVERISHLY interested, and deeply curious as Dick had been while listening to the foregoing dialogue, and accustomed as he was to penetrate an affair, yet it was not until the last words were uttered that he was able to form anything at all like a clear idea of the case.

But that furnished him with a clue, and one which it was very easy to pursue.

Hitherto he had stood without moving in the least from his position, but now he made a change.

The reason that influenced him was, he thought he should have a chance of seeing into the interior of the

room, and not only listen to what was said, but observe the actions of those within, if he moved a little.

He made the trial carefully, choosing for his opportunity the time when their voices were raised loudest in talking. As he expected, he found he could see into the room, but only partially.

In a few words we will describe what it was he saw.

At one end of the apartment was seated, in a strange-looking high-backed chair, an old man.

His frame was much emaciated.

His features covered with a network of wrinkles, which crossed and recrossed each other in every imaginable direction.

His hair—what little there was of it—was snow-white.

His head was bald, and the hair encircled it like a trimming of white fur.

Many marks of great age were upon him, but still they had the appearance of being prematurely caused.

His arms were held on each side by the two men, the accomplices of the stranger in the cloak.

The grasp they kept was a tight one, and they forced him to remain seated in the chair, from which he every moment made an effort to spring.

Dick saw him very plainly, as well as the two men who had him in their grip, but he could not see the principal actor in this strange scene.

He was standing just so as to be out of sight from where Turpin stood.

The door hid him.

One table was in the room, which otherwise was barely furnished.

This table occupied a place near the arm-chair.

Upon it was the dark lantern.

The door containing the convex lens was open, so that the light was diffused over the apartment, instead of being condensed into one broad ray.

Anguish, despair, defiance, alternately distorted the face of the old man.

Such a conflict of the passions could not but be debilitating in the frame of so old and worn a man.

Many speculations concerning what he saw passed through Dick's mind, but he did not stay to elaborate any of them.

That which was taking place engaged the whole of his attention.

After the words the old man had last uttered, the cloaked stranger was unable to speak for a moment or so. He was actually convulsed with rage.

But at the end of that time, instead of giving vent to the burst of passionate invective which rose to his lips, he controlled himself by a mighty effort.

"Leave the past," he said. "To rake it up again can do no good. Attend to my conditions. Assign to me all right and title to the estates which you possess, and then your daughter shall be restored to you; refuse, and her fate will be such as to wring pity from the fiends."

"Cease—cease. Why torture me thus?"

"Why? Because I have determined that all shall be mine—mine, as they would have, had it not been for you. I would have slain you long ago, but I knew the conditions of the will, and the only way in which I can obtain what I covet is by a legal transfer of all from you to me."

"And think you I shall give it?"

"Why not? Surely of the two alternatives I offer, it is the more preferable. I do not reduce you or your daughter to absolute beggary. I will provide you with a competence. You shall both have sufficient to supply you with far more than the necessities of life. You must be blind to your own interests to refuse."

The old man was silent.

The other made no offer to interrupt him, or to press him for a reply.

He hoped, by waiting patiently until he had well weighed it over in his mind, to receive one favorable to his desires.

"What guaranty have I?" asked the old man, at last.

"Guaranty of what?"

"That you will keep faith with me."

"In what?"

"In allowing an income to myself and my poor daughter."

"I swear it."

"I would sooner have your promise than your oath. I should depend on neither."

"In what way can I assure it?"

"I know not, nor do I wish to know it. Again do I defy you, and your utmost power. It may be that you hold me here a helpless prisoner—it may be that you hold my daughter in a similar condition—but, in spite of all that, I defy you—shall continue to defy you—for I have yet faith in heaven's willingness to throw a shield of protection between the helpless and their persecutors."

"Go on—go on! exhaust yourself. You will try my patience in so doing, but still go on. When you are calm—when you no longer rave—then I shall be able to talk with you."

Probably no means could have been found so eminently calculated to effect the end desired.

As if by magic, the old man became calm.

This request to beat out his fury, and the knowledge that it would be passed over without being heeded in the least, made him silent.

On the contrary, had he been opposed, he would have gone on and on, gathering new strength from the conflict.

Of a surety, when the cloaked stranger boasted that the workings of the human heart were well known to him, he said no more than the truth.

The present proved a remarkable example.

Observing that the old man was quiet and subdued, he spoke again.

This time, however, he approached the table.

Then Dick saw him.

But he could gather little more than he already knew.

The broad-brimmed felt hat still concealed his features, and the cloak his form.

But, as he bent down his head over the table, between Dick and the light, a portion of his profile became discernible.

When he saw it, the highwayman was at no loss to detect a likeness—faint, certainly—between the two half-urthers.

He had stooped to put something on the table before the old man, upon which he rested one finger.

It was a piece of parchment, and at one corner was a dark-coloured stamp.

He next produced a pen and ink.

The old man watched his every movement with the greatest eagerness.

But that was a token of the semi-imbecile state to which he had been reduced.

"Behold," said the stranger. "This is a document legally framed, and done so cunningly as to leave no loophole to creep out of. Sign it, and by that act you will make yourself free, and your daughter also. One would think, from your wild speeches, that you were an affectionate father, that you would endure anything rather than one so dear to you should suffer pain."

"Pain?"

"Yes, pain. You need not think that her captivity is anything pleasant, except in comparison with her future fate, if you still continue obstinate."

"Mercy! Have mercy upon me!"

"Have mercy on yourself. Sign that paper, and I will take you hence to the place where she now is. You shall both be free and unmolested from that moment. Do you hear me?"

"I do hear you."

"Then do you consent, or am I at once to close this scene, which would long ago have had an end, had I not felt the tie between us, and been unwilling to have your blood upon my hands?"

For the first time, the old man hesitated.

Dick feared he would consent.

The poet has said, "the woman who hesitates is lost," and the remark is applicable to either sex, under all circumstances.

But, imperfectly as we are at present acquainted with the history of these two men, of whose strange meeting Dick Turpin, the highwayman, so unexpectedly became a spectator and an auditor, yet enough can be gleaned to justify the thought that there were many things to excuse the old man if he wavered.

Ere long, however, the whole will be unfolded to the reader, and it will be found to be the most remarkable episode which has yet been narrated.

Had there been an opportunity, Dick would have interposed, and cautioned the old man not to take his brother's specious promises as granted.

But he had no chance of doing this, and moreover, in the desire he experienced to be of service to him and his daughter, he felt that his best course would be to remain where he was, and not let his presence be suspected.

"Sign!" said the stranger again, "sign! You have had time enough for deliberation. Have you come to a decision?"

The old man was silent.

The pen was dipped in the ink, and thrust into his hand.

Then he looked up.

Tears were in his eyes.

"If," he said, "I thus abalienate my rights, to save my own and my dear daughter's life, will you keep your word with me?"

"I will."

"Enough, then."

With a heavy sigh, the old man put his pen to the paper.

Then, with the rapidity of desperation, and much in the same state as a man is when he commits suicide—when he dreads to think—he signed his name.

But the very instant he finished forming the last stroke his unnatural brother placed a pistol to his head, and drew the trigger with the rapidity of lightning!

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN HAS YET A GREAT DEAL OF TROUBLE WITH HIS FOES, WHO ARE DETERMINED NOT TO GIVE UP THE PURSUIT.

THERE was a flash, and a puff of white coloured smoke, succeeded, without the elapsion of a second, by a loud report.

The old man was dead!

So suddenly was this horrid deed performed.

So rapidly had it been carried out, that Dick Turpin, prompt to move as he generally was, for a moment stood agast.

He had never dreamed of so much perfidy.

He had had his doubts and suspicions of the stranger in the cloak, but he had not thought so badly of him as that.

Could anything more treacherous be conceived!

From the manner in which the deed was done, it must have been premeditated.

As soon as he had recovered somewhat from the sudden shock of astonishment he had received, Dick half started forward.

But ere he could achieve his intention of rushing into the room, and confronting the murderers and their victim, something else occurred which immediately had the effect of arresting his footsteps.

Bang—bang—bang.

Such was the sound which came with sudden and startling distinctness from the front door, which had been struck by some heavy instrument.

Bang—bang—bang.

The intention was to batter down the door.

But if the sound had the effect we have described upon Dick Turpin, who knew perfectly well to what cause to assign it, what effect could it have had upon the guilty wretches in the inner room?

They moved confusedly.

There was but one resource open to Dick.

That was, to ascend the stairs.

He did so before those in the room had recovered themselves.

A panic seemed to have been struck into their guilty breasts.

Bang—bang—bang.

Whatever little noise Dick Turpin might have made in moving, was effectually drowned by the reverberations of the heavy blows as they echoed and re-echoed through the deserted mansion.

Dick Turpin at once came to the conclusion that his pursuers, who had been forgotten, had ascertained in some way whereabouts he was concealed.

They had attacked the house.

Never could their presence have been more inopportune.

At least, Dick thought so.

He had, as we have seen, taken a deep interest in the actors in the scene we have depicted.

He would have liked to have seen the termination of it, and used his own endeavours to right the innocent.

Now, however, there seemed to be but little chance of his doing so.

But one thing remained for him, if he wished to remain uncaptured.

And that was to fly.

To leave the mysterious house, and this strange mystery within it, to elucidate themselves.

The discovery of what had taken place would no doubt create a diversion in his favour.

The reader does not require to be told which he considered to be the most important to himself.

It was to make his way with all speed from that ill-omened spot.

But how was he to do it?

The roof.

That was the thought that darted into his mind instantaneously.

But how was he to reach it?

He was unacquainted with the upper portion of the house.

He was in darkness.

Or nearly so.

The only exceptions were when he happened to be near a window, through which some glimmering of night light penetrated.

He had for a guide the nature of the stairs he had ascended, and he was well enough acquainted with the interior of houses to know that the upper flights do not differ materially from the lower.

Before, however, he had well reached the third landing, his ears were assailed by a terrific crash.

The front door was down.

His pursuers would now soon be close upon his heels.

He would fain have lingered, though, in order to learn what effect the discovery of the murder would have upon them, and whether the three men would escape or be apprehended.

But a consideration for his own safety precluded all idea of this, so he was forced to continue his ascent.

And as he went higher, he remembered, with an uncomfortable spirit, what great difficulty he had had in effecting an entrance.

Was it not only reasonable to argue from this that he would experience an equal amount of trouble in leaving it?

But, not allowing himself to be disheartened by this idea, he hurried on.

From the wound in his shoulder he felt but little pain, which was mainly to be attributed to the skilful manner in which he had bandaged it.

His ankle-joint, however, had swelled to more than double its usual size, and entirely filled his huge top boot, so that every time he moved it was at the expense of a great deal of anguish.

At length, he reached what he had no doubt was the topmost story in the house.

But the place upon which he stood was darker than any other part of the staircase, and he was consequently unable to perceive whether there were any indications of a trap-door in the roof above him.

Groping hastily round the walls, he came to a door, which he immediately opened.

While his hand was upon the knob, a terrible uproar came to his ears from the lower part of the house.

There was a confusion of voices, and the hasty trampling of feet.

Aware as he was that he had no time to lose, yet he could not control the impulse to run to the balusters and peep over.

The sounds still continued, and he had little doubt the body of the murdered man had been discovered.

Lights flashed upon the walls, and it was not long before he found those who carried them were ascending.

But he was yet in doubt whether those persons who had made so forcible an entrance were really his old pursuers from the palace.

Once more, then, crossing the little landing, he passed through the door which he had just before opened, and closed it after him.

The key he felt was on the outer side, so he pulled it out and rapidly locked himself in.

Turning, he saw he stood in a chamber of very limited dimensions.

Facing him was a window, and, from having been so long in the dark, the little light that came in was enough to enable him to distinguish the outlines of the walls.

It appeared destitute of furniture.

But it was merely by a glance which he cast round him that he noted these things. His attention was instantly riveted upon the window as the most likely means of escape.

Treading very softly, for he did not want to betray his whereabouts, he reached it.

The panes were of that kind then almost exclusively in use.

That is to say, small, diamond-like in shape and set in lead.

It opened, of course, in the usual old-fashioned manner, by swinging back upon two vertical hinges, and not by sliding up in a groove.

It was fastened, but it gave him no trouble to turn the little buttons at the top and bottom by which it was secured.

Then the casement swung silently open.

Dick looked out.

As he had quite anticipated, he found himself at the back of the house, and with St. James's Park before him.

His eye wandered over the huge green enclosure, but, so far as he could tell, there was nothing either suspicious or remarkable to be seen.

The pursuit of him had either been abandoned, or else his foes were at that moment in the house.

We may as well set all doubts at rest by saying here that those who had broken in were not the persons who had chased him through the park, but a body of ordinary police-officers.

Their presence can be easily accounted for.

The stranger and his two companions, before they ventured to approach the house, took a long look around and about them, in order to make sure that they were observed by no one.

Having satisfied themselves in this manner, they boldly crossed over, and stood concealed in the shadow of the doorway, which was of a curious and antique fashion.

Then they had entered, as we have recorded.

But it so happened, and it really was about as wonderful a thing as could well happen, they were seen by a Bow-street police-officer.

He had been out upon some special service, and was returning, when by chance he saw three dim shadowy figures cross the street, and disappear in the doorway of the haunted house.

This circumstance in itself looked a simple one enough, but not only was the behaviour of the men exciting of suspicion, but the officer well knew the house to be uninhabited and haunted.

He was, however, of rather a matter-of-fact turn of mind, and he came at once to the conclusion that he had discovered a very important thing indeed.

With great presence of mind, then, he had shrunk back into the shadow of the houses, and arrested his footsteps, in order that the mysterious individuals should not take the alarm.

When he had waited what he considered was a proper length of time, he left his place of concealment, and approached the door.

It was closed, and presented no signs of having been so recently opened.

The officer placed his ear against the panel.

All was still.

But, feeling certain that he had not been deceived in what he saw, although there were now no indications of it, he hastened off at full speed to procure assistance.

CHAPTER CCXXXVIII.

THE OFFICERS OF POLICE PURSUE THE MURDERERS, AND A RATHER LUDICROUS MISTAKE IS MADE BY DICK'S FOES FROM THE PALACE.

It was during his absence upon this errand that the strange interview between the half-brothers took place.

Had the officers arrived a little earlier than they did, the awful and cold-blooded murder would doubtless have been prevented.

But fate had decreed it otherwise.

Just as they reached the portal, the clear, ringing report of the pistol reached their ears.

This was enough to warrant them in taking rather more energetic proceedings than they would otherwise have done.

They cattered down the door.

This done, they stood for a moment in listening attitudes, in order to learn in what portion of the house the disturbance was taking place.

Sounds came very clearly to their ears from above.

They bounded up the stairs, therefore, with all possible speed.

All were provided with lights, which they held in their left hands.

Guided by a hasty ejaculation, they proceeded to the room on the second floor, in which the murder had been committed.

They pushed open the door, which still stood ajar, and entered in a body.

The first thing they perceived was a door in front of them.

In the general rush forward which all made to reach it, one stumbled over the prostrate body of the old man, which had not been noticed, and fell heavily to the floor.

In a moment their lights were turned upon the spot, and then the hideous object was fully brought to view.

Their comrade was assisted to his feet.

"Never mind the body," he cried; "but look after the murderers, or else they will escape."

"Which way shall we go?"

"Some on the landing outside, to see that no one goes up or comes down the stairs, and the remainder through yonder door, which is the way I fancy they have taken."

As soon as these words were spoken, the officers divided themselves into two portions.

The officer who had given the instructions what to do, and assumed the office of chief, choose himself to go through the door.

They found upon passing through it, that it led into another chamber similar to the one they had just left.

Another door led out of it to a small staircase.

Down this they rushed with the utmost precipitation.

At the time that house was built the principle of making two staircases was much more generally adopted than it is at the present day.

The stairs leading from the hall was what was called the grand staircase.

The other, the secondary one, which was used by the domestics in the establishment.

It was down this latter one, then, that the officers precipitated themselves in search of the murderers.

The bottom was reached in an incredibly short space of time.

A gush of cool air came to their faces, which showed them that a means of exit must be somewhere close at hand.

And in fact a little door was found, which, when they passed through, they discovered led into a narrow passage.

Pursuing this, they came to the garden at the back of the mansion, looking into St. James's Park.

They had made good speed, for on looking before them, two men were seen effecting a hasty retreat over the palisades.

"Halt! or we fire," shouted the officers, hastening forward; "surrender, or you are dead men!"

But their words were quite unheeded.

Before, however, they could descend, the officers fired a volley of pistols at them.

Groans and shrieks mingled with the discharge.

But as soon as the smoke cleared away, nothing was to be seen of the men.

They had merely fallen upon the hard road on the other side, and were too severely hurt to be able to escape.

Here they were quickly captured.

They were the two accomplices—the principal had succeeded in making an escape.

But only temporarily.

The different exits to the park were, as we know, strictly guarded, and there was no chance of leaving the enclosure by the ordinary means of egress.

The two men had neither received a dangerous wound; they were, indeed, more frightened than hurt.

The blood, however, was stanchied, and handkerchiefs placed upon their wrists.

Not knowing that the gates had been closed, and not being able to hear any sounds of footsteps, no attempt was made to search for the third person who entered the house, as they believed that such a search could only prove resultless.

Content with their prey, they returned to the house, in order to regain their companions on the landing.

Leaving, however, these and Dick for a little while, we will devote a word or two of very necessary explanation to the man in the cloak.

When he heard the heavy blows struck upon the door, he guessed in a moment that, by some unforeseen means or other, all had been discovered.

The suddenness, however, with which the intelligence had come upon him, deprived him for a minute or two of all power of action.

Then, recovering himself, he called to the men to follow him.

By his actions, it would appear that he was intimately acquainted with the interior of the house.

Without hesitation, he made his way to the door on the opposite side of the room.

It was fastened, but he quickly had it open.

He did not stay to see whether his followers closed it after them or not, but rushed down the stairs and out into the garden.

With an agility that no one would have thought he possessed, he leaped the palisades, and alighted on his feet in Birdcage-walk.

Nothing but instant flight, he considered, would save him.

Anticipating no difficulty in leaving the park, he ran at full speed in the direction of the Horse-guards.

He heard the report of the pistols, and guessed that his followers had been made prisoners.

A curse escaped his lips, for, next to preserving his own freedom, he wished to insure theirs.

It was in their power to reveal some very disagreeable secrets, which he preferred should be kept from the light of day.

He had no chance of rescuing them, he knew, and therefore did not make the attempt.

His original intention had been to make his way into Whitehall through the Horse-guards, but upon nearing this place, he caught sight of several officers on duty.

This induced him to alter his mind.

There was the narrow passage at Spring-gardens, which would answer his purpose quite as well, if not better.

Hurrying along in the darkness, he directly afterwards came in sight of the Mall, or broad-walk through the Park, leading from Charing-cross to Buckingham-palace.

To his dismay, he saw, at no very great distance, several figures moving rapidly.

He could distinguish them because they carried torches, which made them look like dim spectres.

By their manner, he could tell they were searching for some one or something.

Who could it be but himself?

He jumped to the conclusion no one.

A desperate effort must therefore be made to get free. They did not see him where he stood—for he had come to a halt when he first caught sight of them—he felt pretty sure.

He must take care that they should not do so now.

A person less intimately acquainted with the position of the different objects in the park than he was would never have been able to direct their steps so unerringly to the point he wished to reach.

That point was the gate leading out into Spring-gardens. Little did he dream how blindly he was rushing on to his own capture—what pains he was taking to effect it.

Skulking along in the shadow of the trees, in order that he should not be perceived, he came at length to a place where it was no longer possible to do this.

He reached the gate.

In the deep darkness he did not notice that the gate was closed, or if he did thought nothing of it, making sure that it would be opened at his command.

He was doomed to be woefully deceived.

He darted forward.

No sooner did he do so, than the sentinel on guard, who had heard his approach, and wisely continued silent, grasped him by the throat.

Then he raised such an outcry as would have reached the ears of the party from the palace, had they been at thrice the distance they really were.

On they came.

The stranger made a desperate effort to release himself. But it was in vain.

The sentinel at that time on duty happened to be the strongest man in the whole regiment.

Powerful as he was, the stranger was but a child in his grasp.

Then the others came up.

The police-officer, with a cry of wild exultation, clasped the struggling prisoner round the breast, thus pinioning his arms to his side.

"I've got him!" he cried. "Hurrah! Nabbed at last! Hurrah! Capital! Tie him up, somebody! Make haste!"

Some rope was produced, and with this the stranger was bound very tightly indeed.

"Bring him along," cried the officer. "Bring him along. I knowed I should have him! Somebody call a coach, and I'll have him taken to Newgate at once."

The iron gate was flung open, and the whole party passed through it.

It did not take them more than a minute to reach Charing-cross, and then they looked about them for a hackney-coach.

CHAPTER CCXXXIX.

THE STRANGER IS TAKEN TO NEWGATE, AND IS ALL BUT SET FREE, WHEN ANOTHER ARRIVAL AT THE PRISON TAKES PLACE.

Of course the reader has not failed to perceive the mistake into which the pursuers of Dick Turpin had fallen.

It seems at first sight rather remarkable that such should have been the case, but after a minute or two's consideration, it will look extremely probable.

In the first place, from the length of time the gates had been closed, they felt pretty sure that there could be no one in the park except the person of whom they were in search.

Then the manner in which the stranger had been caught, all looked as though it was their prey.

He had also favoured them in a great measure, and helped to fix the deceit in their minds, for when he began to run, feeling his cloak a very great incumbrance, he unfastened the little clasp at the throat, and allowed it to fall on the ground beside him.

A puff of wind soon afterwards blew off his large felt hat.

It rolled away into the darkness instantly, and he made no attempt to recover it.

The dress which his cloak concealed was, as Dick had seen, composed of the richest materials, and, as might be expected from that fact, was made in a fashionable manner.

In general appearance, therefore, as he was about the same height as the highwayman, he did not greatly differ from him.

His hat was off, and his hair partially hid his face.

The remarkable black-looking beard, too, had disappeared, which showed it was a false one.

Under all these circumstances, and bearing in mind that the only light they had was such as the torches afforded, the surprise which their blunder at first excited gradually passes away.

Not the faintest breath of suspicion rested on the minds of any of the party.

Indeed, the question of whether this was really the man they sought never entered the heads of one of them.

The elation of the officer at his having been so fortunate as to capture the celebrated Dick Turpin, was very great, and manifested itself in a very extraordinary manner.

At that busy spot they had not long to wait, late as the hour was, before a hackney coach made its appearance.

The driver was hailed, and the vehicle with some difficulty brought to a standstill near the kerb-stone.

The door was then opened, and the prisoner, who said not a word, was thrust inside in no very gentle manner.

Of course, he thought it strange that his foes should be so close upon his track, but a guilty conscience needs no excuse, and he, therefore, did not ask the motive of his captivity.

"Where to?" asked the driver, gruffly.

The officer hesitated a moment, and then answered—

"Newgate!"

The reason of his hesitation was this.

The great city prison was only used for the detention of such prisoners as had been duly committed by a magistrate to take their trial at the sessions.

This rule was, however, at times departed from, and the officer thought the present occasion sufficiently important to warrant his departing from it now.

Several warrants had, from time to time, been issued for the apprehension of the notorious highwayman, and one thing that influenced the officer was, that no prison could be so secure as that.

To be sure, not very many years back, the celebrated Jack Sheppard had made his escape from it, but then he was the only person on record who had performed so incredible a feat.

The driver, as soon as he received the order, whipped up his sleepy cattle, and drove straight to his destination.

Those acquainted with London, of course know that the distance between Charing-cross and the Old Bailey is not very great, but still it takes time to pass over the ground.

At a shuffling sort of trot, then, the horses made their way along the Strand and Fleet-street, and up Ludgate-hill.

There was no light in the inside of the coach, so the mistake was not likely to be discovered there.

The officer was seated by the side of the prisoner.

Major Nicholson sat opposite.

The others had climbed up on the roof, while not a few ran along by the side of the coach, which they were able to do without very greatly exhausting themselves.

At length the gloomy walls of Newgate were reached.

A thundering peal was delivered with the knocker upon the door through which prisoners were admitted.

Since the dismissal of Mr. Tapner, and the appointment of Mr. Cawthorn in his place, several improvements in the prison regulations had been made.

All those men who had been found derelicting from their duty in any way, or exceeding it, had been summarily dismissed.

Consequently there was almost a new set of officials in the prison itself, though not many changes had taken place among the officers themselves.

That some alterations had been made could have been seen by any one who was acquainted with the management of things under the old code, for the door was opened immediately.

Without much trouble, the prisoner was got out of the coach, and escorted to the vestibule.

Morning was not very far distant, but still it was quite dark and night like.

The only illumination that there was in the vestibule proceeded from an oil lamp, the rays from which were of a very dim and sickly character indeed.

The result of this was that neither the officer nor Major Nicholson found out the mistake they had made.

"Where's the governor?" roared the former, in a voice of the utmost importance. "Where's the governor?"

"In his blessed bed, I hope, and fast asleep," replied the man on the lock.

"Go and wake him, then, and tell him to come here immediately, as I have a prisoner of the utmost importance to give into his charge."

"I'm on the lock, and it's more than my place is worth to leave it till my time's up."

"Where's some one who can go?"

"Why, there's Jinks somewhere about. Hi! Jinks. Where are you? You're wanted."

This man, who had been to some other part of the prison, hearing himself called, made his appearance.

"Wot's the row?"

"Mr. Cawthorne is wanted. Go and call him."

The man, who seemed of rather a sly nature, made no reply, but at once set off upon his errand.

About ten minutes elapsed, and then the governor made his appearance.

"Mr. Cawthorne," said the officer, "you won't grumble when you know what you have been called up for."

"What is it?"

"At last—I may say at last—I have succeeded in doing what so many others have tried and failed to do. Here is Dick Turpin, the highwayman, for the first time a prisoner within the walls of Newgate."

"Dick Turpin!" ejaculated the governor.

"Dick Turpin!" echoed the prisoner, in tones of the greatest surprise. "Dick Turpin! My fine fellows, you have made some mistake. I am no more Dick Turpin than you are."

"Ha! ha! ha! Very good! Ha! ha! ha!" laughed those assembled.

"That dodge won't do, Dick," said the officer. "Lor! bless you, we are not quite so green."

"Green or blue," said the stranger, "I tell you I am not Dick Turpin."

"Ah! well, it don't much matter."

"The devil it don't. How do you make that out?"

"Why, you will have an opportunity of proving your identity, that's all."

"But I protest against this," cried the stranger. "Call who you like, I tell you I'm not Dick Turpin."

Something in the tones of his voice sounded rather unfamiliar to the ears of Major Nicholson, and, in spite of himself, he felt the disagreeable conviction creeping over him that he had made some dreadful mistake.

"More light," he cried. "More light. I will soon set this matter at rest."

"Lor, sir! you needn't take the trouble. There isn't no doubts to set at rest. However, here's my bull's-eye lantern."

With these words on his lips, the officer produced the article mentioned, and handed it to the major, who removed the slide with a nervous hand.

Then he allowed the broad, bright ray of light to fall full upon the prisoner's face, who bore the examination unflinchingly.

But the very first glance was sufficient to confirm the major's worst suspicions.

The man they had with so much trouble made prisoner was not the man they wanted.

The officer who had so congratulated himself upon his prize made the same discovery at the same moment.

He was too much astounded and overcome at first, but at length he broke out with—

"Oh! blow me tight, here's a go!"

"Come, come," said Mr. Cawthorne, who was not in the most amiable of tempers at having been called out of his warm bed on a cold night, "what's the meaning of this?"

The officer looked dreadfully chafallen.

The major replied for him—

"We have made an unfortunate mistake. This is not Dick Turpin."

The stranger smiled triumphantly.

Then the officer spoke.

"That may or may not be; but there's something peculiar about the whole affair, and quite enough to warrant our detaining him on suspicion."

"Do so, at your peril," said the stranger. "Release me at once, or you shall pay dearly for this night's work."

There was something very authoritative in the manner in which he spoke.

"What shall I do, Mr. Cawthorne?"

"If you are sure he is not the person you want, you ought by all means to let him go free, after apologising for the treatment he has received."

"I will waive the latter part if you will let me go at once," said the stranger; "for the time I have lost is of the utmost importance to my own interests."

"In"—began the governor; but what he was going to say is unknown, for he was interrupted by a violent banging at the prison door.

CHAPTER CCXL.

THE OFFICERS CHASE DICK TURPIN OVER THE LONG TOPS.

WHAT ensued upon the knocking at the door must be left to another chapter, for we feel it is quite time we returned to the adventures of the chief character in this history.

A portion of the officers had stationed themselves near the landing on the second floor of the haunted mansion, in order to see that no one made his escape.

Casting their lights around them, they quickly discovered the trace of footsteps.

When Dick ascended the stairs, he had noticed he trod upon some soft, yielding substance.

But what that substance was he did not pause to inquire, though it would have been quite as well if he had done so.

The soft substance was dust.

Dust collected in such incredible quantities that it lay as thickly as snow.

Like snow, too, it retained the impression of every pressure.

The officers then discovered upon the upper flight of stairs such indications as left no doubt upon their minds that some one had ascended only a short time before them.

Having made this discovery, they deputed the office of guarding to one of their number, and hastened up the stairs in pursuit.

That they should fall into the mistake of supposing that the footsteps were those of one of the three men who had been seen to enter was natural enough.

Every stair bore the impress of the same boots, so it was the easiest matter imaginable to follow the track.

Up, up they went, until at length they reached the place where they terminated altogether—namely, at the door of the room which Dick had entered and secured after him.

Nothing was heard from the interior, and they immediately set about battering the door down in the same manner as they had the other one.

At the very first blow it gave symptoms of yielding, so it soon fell upon the floor.

Dick had opened the window when he found the men were really after him, with a view to making his escape by its means.

But this, he found, would be very difficult and dangerous.

Upon looking out, he saw that he was indeed at the top of the house, but the window, instead of looking out upon the tiles, as attic windows usually do, was flush with the building.

Casting his eyes upwards, he saw that the top part of the window was immediately beneath a stone parapet or coping, which seemed to run completely round the building.

It was just possible, he thought, by standing upon the window-sill, to reach the edge of this parapet.

Then, having done this, he felt pretty sure of his own power to draw himself up and over it fairly on to the roof of the mansion.

But the danger was immense.

Still his enemies would have all the greater difficulty in reaching him; and should he stay where he was, he must inevitably die or be captured.

Of the two alternatives he would have chosen the first, and he would rather have received his death by a fall from the top of the house to the bottom, than at their hands.

Accordingly he resolved to run the risk, being comforted with the assurance that death was all he could meet with.

This feeling inspired him with a kind of desperate daring, which not a little helped him to prosecute his perilous undertaking.

Mounting on to the window-sill, and holding tightly one half of the casement for support, he carefully and slowly got to an upright position.

Then shifting his grasp from the side to the top of the window, he steadied himself.

It was just when he had reached so far that the door showed unequivocal symptoms of giving way.

But he did not allow this circumstance to unnerve or flurvy him for a moment.

When he was balanced he moved one hand, and supported himself with the other.

The one at liberty he raised above his head as high as he possibly could.

To his joy, he found that he could just take hold of the edge of the stonework.

Still his grasp was an insecure one.



[THE LADY IN THE COACH MAKES AN APPEAL TO DICK TURPIN.]

The least thing would destroy his equilibrium. And should the coping-stone give way beneath his weight, which was no improbable event, nothing could save him from utter destruction.

This was sufficient to dismay even the boldest heart, but Dick Turpin was undaunted.

He clutched the edge of the stone as tightly as the muscles in his fingers would allow him.

He had then the most perilous part of his task to perform.

And that was to release his hold upon the window, trusting entirely to the one he had upon the parapet, and raise that arm to a level with the other.

But pressing himself against the wall as close as he could, he succeeded in doing this.

Then his course was comparatively easy.

Exerting all his strength, and giving a slight upward impulse to his body, he raised himself until his breast was on a level with the topmost edge of the parapet.

No. 44.—BLACK BESS.

He then, with little difficulty, got one leg up, and finally rolled on to the roof in safety.

But he did not perform the feat quite quick enough to throw the officers off the scent.

They saw with wonder the route he had taken.

Every one placed too high a value upon his life to risk it, by attempting to follow the adventurous highwayman.

The idea, however, simultaneously occurred to all of them that there must be a trap-door somewhere at hand, by which access could be had with speed and safety.

Nor were they disappointed, for in the ceiling over the landing was the object for which they sought.

Had Turpin possessed a light as they did, he would have found it likewise, and used that mode of reaching the roof, but we know he was in the profoundest darkness.

Some little delay on the part of the officers took place,

owing to their inability to procure anything by which the trap-door could be reached.

But at last this obstacle was overcome, and, with all the speed they could possibly make, they scrambled out upon the tiles.

But they had now little to guide them.

Dick had got out five minutes before them, at the least.

However, they made a guess as to the direction he would most probably take, and set about searching for him with right good will.

Dick, however, had made the most of his time.

When he had accomplished his extraordinary and unparalleled feat, he laid still upon the tiles for a few seconds to recover himself.

Alive, however, to the necessity there was for immediate action, he scrambled along the gutter in which he found himself until he could go no further.

Raising himself, he looked over the low stone wall, and found that he was divided from the next house by a chasm about four feet in width.

The distance was not very considerable, but a leap would be no trifling matter.

He looked down.

Or rather strove to do so, for the thick obscurity hid all things from his gaze at a depth of more than a few yards.

Dick cast one glance behind him.

His pursuers were not in sight.

Here, then, was an unexpected opportunity of getting free from them.

Without any more hesitation, he climbed up on to the parapet, and, standing on the top of the wall, made a spring upon the next house.

He performed the distance safely, but alighted with considerable force—so much so, indeed, that he feared the roof would give way beneath him.

But this apprehension proved groundless, and he crawled along much in the same fashion that he had done before.

To his joy, however, he found he had no more such gulfs to cross. The houses were built in one solid block.

Taking care to crouch down so as to be out of sight, he crept on and on.

He heard the sounds of his pursuers on his track, and this warned him to be still more careful not to make a noise, or do anything that would betray his position.

Presently he came to the end of the street.

He looked over, but could see nothing by which he could accomplish a descent.

His heart now misgave him, and the reader can judge what a relief it was when he found that the houses were continued at a right angle.

The further the distance he placed between himself and his enemies, before he made any attempt to leave the roofs, the better he knew it would be for him, so he pushed on with still greater speed than before.

But after a while, when he found that his enemies were out of hearing, he cast about him for some means by which he could descend from his elevated position.

A rope just then would have been of especial value to him, but as there was no probability of his obtaining one, it was no use for him to think about that.

He must find some other mode.

The most natural idea to occur to him was to seek an entrance through one of the numerous attic windows, but then he felt the great danger there was of raising an alarm if he should do this.

But he could not see how he was to avoid it, so he determined to run all risks, and trust to his luck, which certainly had befriended him already in a most surprising manner.

When he made this resolution he saw an attic window a few feet before him, and towards this he crept.

On reaching this, he ventured to peep through the window.

But he did so very cautiously, for as there was no light in the room, of course any one within it would immediately be able to distinguish his dark outline.

CHAPTER CCXLI.

AN ENTRANCE IS MADE THROUGH THE ATTIC WINDOW, AND A FRESH ADVENTURE BEFALLS THE HIGHWAYMAN. DICK TURPIN strained his vision to the utmost, but he could see nothing.

He listened at the same time, but no sounds came to his ears.

To be sure this was no great proof that the chamber was unoccupied, but it sufficed for Dick.

Creeping still further, until he came quite in front of the window, he slid his hand up it, to see whether it was unfastened.

As he more than suspected, it was secure.

Such a fastening, however, as it possessed, he knew very well he could undo without making much noise.

Taking a pocket-knife from his pocket, he opened the largest blade, and, with the point of it, gently raised the lead round one of the panes nearest the fastening.

Having loosened it all round, he next proceeded to remove it from its setting.

This was done skilfully and silently.

Then, squeezing his hand through the contracted aperture, he undid the fastening.

The casement creaked open.

Nothing indicative of an alarm reached his ears.

But he paused before he ventured to enter.

After a short interval, however, finding the silence continue, he cautiously got through the window into the room.

To his delight, he found not only was it untenanted, but destitute of all furniture.

In order not to leave so palpable an index to the road he had taken as the open casement would do, he closed and refastened it.

Then sought about for the door of the room.

His intention was to try whether he could not descend the stairs without notice, and make his way out through the front door.

At that hour of the night, when most persons would be in a deep slumber, there seemed to be a strong degree of probability this plan of action would succeed.

The door of the room was composed of some kind of dark wood, and, as the walls were whitewashed, it showed out in strong relief.

The only fastening it had was a rude kind of drop latch, which Turpin raised cautiously, and then allowed the door to swing open.

Before him the darkness was most intense.

"I would give something," he muttered, "for the commonest rush candle that ever was made, but it is no good thinking about that; I have no light, and no means of getting one."

That the head of the stairs must be somewhere close at hand to where he stood he felt pretty certain, and he, after a moment's reflection, hit upon rather a clever expedient to ascertain their precise situation.

He went down upon his hands and knees, and crept cautiously forward.

It was well he took this precaution, for he found that he had been standing much nearer the top of the staircase than he had imagined, and a heavy fall down them would not only have severely injured himself, but raised an immediate alarm.

His great object was to get away from that house unobserved.

But fate had determined to place some obstacles in his path which would be by no means easy to overcome.

The first or top flight of stairs were, however, descended in silence and safety.

More than once, however, he stumbled against different things, but he did not make a loud enough noise to startle any one.

Creeping steadily onwards, he reached, at length, the hall leading to the front door.

A few steps now would lead him to freedom.

But at that moment there came to his ears a sound like the opening of a door, and then the flashing of a light appeared upon the stairs.

Some one was descending.

Voices, too, became audible.

Dick felt at once that it would be impossible for him to run to the door, and undo its fastenings unperceived.

He knew not whether any of his foes were lurking outside, but such a thing was extremely probable.

What was he to do?

He had no time to reflect or decide upon which was the best course to pursue.

A door was close to his right hand.

It was ajar.

It seemed to lead into a parlour of some kind.

The interior was in perfect darkness.

Likely enough he would find somewhere within it a secure hiding-place which would serve him for a little while.

He slipped in.

The door stood open just wide enough to allow him to do so.

The atmosphere within was of a genial warmth, and through the obscurity he saw the dull red embers of an expiring fire.

This seemed to indicate that its occupants had only recently quitted it.

Dick noticed these things, but, at the same time, paid particular attention to the persons he heard approaching.

Step by step they came down the staircase, with great deliberation. By the voices, Dick quickly found there were two of them.

That they were male and female.

That they were aged.

Upon reaching the foot of the stairs, they came straight up the passage.

A few rays from the light they carried penetrated the apartment in which Dick had taken refuge.

Could it be possible they were coming towards it?

That they intended to enter it?

If so, what an unfortunate and unlucky step it was for him to take to seek shelter there.

But there was no time for regret.

The best thing he could do was to hide himself at once, and trust to his luck.

They were coming towards that door, it is true, but then it was just as likely as not that they would pass it.

Dick made first for the window, in the hope of finding some curtains there, behind which he could conceal himself.

Nor was this hope doomed to defeat.

Some curtains were there, and, by the feel, long heavy curtains, too.

They were not drawn across the window, but hung in folds at the side of it.

Choosing the one nearest the door, Dick slipped behind it, and arranged the folds in such a manner as to effectually prevent any one suspecting a person was concealed there.

He was only just in time.

Scarcely had the curtains ceased to flutter than the door was pushed open, and the old couple entered, carrying a light.

The curtains, Dick now found, were of a semi-transparent quality, for he found, now the light was on the other side, he could see into the room with perfect plainness.

The person who first entered was a venerable-looking man, clothed in a fashion that even then was quite obsolete.

In his hand he carried a curiously-constructed lamp, which emitted a much greater amount of illumination than lamps at that time generally gave.

He was followed at a very short distance by a lady, as old, as venerable, and as strangely dressed as himself.

Both were attired with that scrupulous exactness which was so noticeable in elderly people a couple of generations back.

But what struck Dick most, and attracted the chief part of his attention, was that upon the countenances of both of them was an expression of the utmost grief.

That grief, however, was not of a violent or demonstrative kind. On the contrary, it was subdued and chastened, as though the sorrow under which they laboured was of long continuance.

That they were husband and wife, it did not require a second glance to see.

There was that indescribable but unmistakable resemblance between them.

At a rough guess, the age of the old man could not have been less than sixty years.

How much older he was, it would be hard to say, but there are some who assume a patriarchal look much earlier than others.

His wife was not much his junior.

They were speaking when they entered, and the first words Dick heard were these:

"It's no good, wife—no good at all. I can't help it. So don't say another word. I have tried to rest, but I cannot—I cannot."

"Calm yourself, John," said the wife, gently and soothingly. "Calm yourself, pray. Put the lamp down on the table, and I will stir the fire. Come, John, do."

The old man, with a trembling hand, placed the lamp upon the table, as he had been requested, while his wife stirred the embers together, and made them burst into quite a cheerful blaze. After depositing the lamp, the old man, with a faint sigh, sank back into an arm-chair and covered his face with his hands.

"You are not going to weep, John, surely?" said his wife, as she perceived the action, and drawing away the thin wasted hands as she spoke. "You are not going to weep. Cheer up."

The old man shook his head despondingly.

"I can't help it, Martha," he replied. "You know it is always the same, and as each succeeding year comes round, instead of my sorrow abating, it increases."

"But you should try to bear up under your affliction, John. It is wicked to repine, though, Heaven knows, our cross is heavy enough to bear—I—"

The kind-hearted wife's voice failed her at this juncture, and she sobbed aloud.

With a praiseworthy devotion she had striven to ease the drooping spirits of her husband, and sunk herself in the attempt.

It was now the husband's turn to console.

He drew a pretty carpeted stool close to his chair, and gently forced his wife to sit upon it.

Then he smoothed her thin, silvery hair upon her forehead, as he had been wont to smooth it years long, long ago, when that hair was thick and glossy, and black as jet itself, and when that now careworn and wrinkled brow vied with polished marble in its fair smoothness. He accompanied the action with a smile so wan, so sickly, and so sad, that it was more heart-breaking to look upon than his grief.

CHAPTER CXXLII.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THE CAUSE OF THE OLD COUPLE'S GRIEF, AND HIS HEART IS DEEPLY TOUCHED BY THEIR DEVOTION.

THERE was something so peculiar about this old couple, and something so mysterious in their grief, that Dick became immediately interested in them.

Above all, their kind and affectionate demeanour towards each other made a deep impression on his heart.

It touched him acutely, and when he witnessed their vain attempts to console each other, he felt a disagreeable choking sensation rising up in his throat.

The same had the effect of pressing his own isolated state upon his mind.

There he was, a foe to all men.

His hand was raised against his fellow-creatures, and their hands against him.

In the hour of tribulation there was no one to console him or make his load of affliction lighter.

But he banished these thoughts as much as he could, and vain would have escaped being any longer spectator of a scene that was so painful to his feelings.

But this was quite out of the question, and, besides, a certain kind of fascination, a strange contradictory feeling, made him long to be away and yet desirous of learning more.

"My dear wife," continued the old man, in a broken voice, "God bless you for your kindness to me, and the meek spirit which enables you to sustain your heavy load of grief with fortitude and resignation. We are poor weak creatures. In spite of myself, when this dreadful anniversary comes round, my spirits completely give way, and I cannot rest, sleeping or waking."

"I know that, John, and it shows how affectionate and good a heart yours is, or it would not be so. We ought

not to repine, though, quite so much as we do. Try, John, if for once you cannot overmaster it."

"I have tried, wife, and no one, not even you, knows how hard. But my heart bleeds whenever I think of it. It seems to me as though the wounds would never heal."

"It is a long time since they were inflicted, but mine seem as poignant as at first."

"So do mine—so do mine; and so you see, wife, how it is I cannot bear this dreadful night in the year to come round."

"It is almost over now, John. In an hour or two we shall see the sun, and a new day will begin. You—you will be more cheerful then, will you not?"

"I will strive to be. But, oh! wife, when I picture her—when I think how good—no, not how good—how beautiful she was—she was very beautiful, was she not, Martha?"

"Too beautiful, John," replied the wife, as she burst into a flood of tears. "She was too beautiful, too happy, and—and——"

"Good, you would say. Yes, that is the word which your lips hesitate to utter. She was too beautiful to be good; and yet, wife, do you know——"

"What, John?"

"Sometimes, when I reflect upon the past, I do not think her quite so much to blame—not quite so much to blame as I used to think she was in olden times."

"Bless you, John. I believe, even now, if she was to return—if she was to kneel at your feet and entreat your forgiveness——"

"Hold! hold!" cried the aged man, vehemently. "Do not speak of such a thing, do not speak of it. You make me feel quite strange."

"I know how you feel, John. You would like to see her once more before your eyes for ever closed in death. You would like to tell her that, deeply as she has sinned against us, you forgive her. Am I right, John?"

There was no reply, but Dick saw the old grief-stricken man bowed his head still lower and lower, till his cheek rested against his wife's forehead.

It was a touching scene, and hard indeed would that heart have been which could have witnessed it without emotion.

There was about them both all the fondness of early years. Their affection had been a lasting one, but, perhaps it was their deep and mutual grief which had served to knit them into closer bonds of union.

Singly they would never have borne up against it, but, united as they were, the one sustained the other in the hour when their affliction was the deepest, and thus the one alternately proved a support to the other.

"John! John!" said the wife again. "You do not answer me. Tell me whether I am right. Do you think you could quite forgive her? Do answer me."

"I should, Martha. I never thought that I should be able to forget the past, and overlook it, but now I feel that I can do so. As you say, it would be a consolation of no slight description, if I could see her once more on this earth. But why should we think of that? There—there is no hope for it!"

"I fear not," replied his wife, gently. "But yet I like to know that if she should come, you could pardon her! Tell me so again, John."

"Do you forgive her?"

"Do I? Oh! John, how can you ask me such a question? Where is the mother to be found who could not forget and willingly forgive the sins of her own daughter?"

"Not you, Martha! You have forgiven her long ago—I know that; but my heart was hardened against her."

"And enough to make it, John, enough to make it; but you are sure it is softened now?"

"Yes, at this moment, should she come before me, I feel I could grant her forgiveness, unasked."

"God bless you for those words, John! You have a kind, good heart. What years of anguish she has caused."

"Do not speak of that now. Let the past be forgiven. Oh! that I could see her once more—only once!"

"Your prayer, John, may be answered some day! You should recollect that we have never seen her since she fled—have had no explanation from her. Who then can tell what arts were used, what means employed to wean her from us?"

"As you say. Sometimes I think we have been heavily but justly punished."

"How so, John?"

"We thought too much of her. We exalted her by far too much—indeed, we almost worshipped her. She left us."

"Yes, that is it! I feel happier now. Do you, John?"

"I do."

"It is because you have forgiven her. You can bear to talk now about what has always driven you mad. Can you not?"

"Do you mean the past?"

"I do."

"I think I can."

"Do you know how long ago it is—since—since——"

"Since she left her home, to throw herself into a villain's arms?"

"Don't speak like that, dear John; you almost break my heart. But that is what I meant. Do you know how long ago it is?"

"Yes; this very night is the thirteenth anniversary of the event."

"Do you recollect that morning, John? Do not be excited, but let us talk gently over the past. I found the letter, John; you remember she wrote it before she left us?"

"Oh! God, yes—yes! Too well I recollect all that took place upon that awful day! It is written on my brain in characters of fire, which nothing will erase!"

"But forgiveness," pleaded his wife, "nothing but forgiveness. You told me you could forgive her."

"Forgive me, Martha. I am a weak-hearted and sinful old man."

"But do you remember that letter?"

"Why?"

"You read it?"

"I did, and was not blinded by the words; but almost—almost."

"You have never seen it since that morning, have you, John?"

"Never."

"Do you know what became of it?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Should you not like to see it once more, if such a thing was possible? To once more hold in your hands that which she last touched before she left us!"

"Wife—wife!"

"What, John?"

"You have not got that letter!"

"I have indeed, John. I have never parted with it since that dreadful morning. I have carried it in my bosom till it is almost worn out, and it is stained in many places by tears; for whenever I could find an opportunity, I used to read it; and never without weeping."

"Martha! Can it be possible that you have kept this to yourself—that you have had this consolation, and refused to allow me to share it with you?"

"You are not angry, John?"

"No—no, not angry, but——"

"You know you never could bear to have that day alluded to, until to-night, and I am afraid that the sight of it would anger you."

"I dare say it would—I dare say it would."

"And so, you see, I kept it a secret—the only secret, John, that I have ever had from you."

"Bless you, I believe you. But have you that letter now?"

"I have. I am never without it."

"Let—let——"

"Let what?"

"Let me see it."

"Should you like to do so?"

"I should indeed."

"Would it still further soften your heart?"

"I think so—I think so."

"Then I will read it to you."

"Do so, Martha."

"You can look upon the paper while I do so. Oh! you cannot think how I cling to it. It is the only thing I have in remembrance of her. You had all other things destroyed, and her bed-room door nailed up and covered, so that none should ever see or enter it."

"I did all that, Martha."

"But never mind now, John. Since that time we have never been able to see or hear anything of her. I wonder where she went."

"You will break my heart. Cease, oh! cease!"

"I think much upon the past, and should like you to do the same; we could talk then about that, as we do about other things."

"You are right, Martha; but where is the letter?"

"Here, John. You see it is very much worn, but it is quite perfect. I have taken such care of it, for I thought perhaps it would be all we should ever see of her."

As the old lady spoke, she drew from her bosom a little parcel.

Carefully taking off the cover, a folded letter was disclosed, and this, with trembling fingers, she spread out upon her husband's knee, while her tears fell thick and fast upon it.

CHAPTER CXXLIH.

WITH A LITTLE TROUBLE, DICK MANAGES TO GET OUT INTO THE OPEN AIR ONCE MORE.

"TAKE heart, Martha, take heart," said the old man. "You were going to show me how to be brave and firm. Come—come, read the letter!"

"With a great effort, the heart-broken mother subdued her emotion, and then began to read as follows:

"My dear, dear parents,—What will you think when you find I have gone, and when this letter falls into your hands? I tremble when I think of it, but your anger, if there is any, will, I am certain, pass away when you read this explanation.

"I have had a secret from you, my dear parents. I have guarded it jealously, and even your affectionate eyes have failed to notice it.

"Could I have had my own way, it would never have been kept a secret, but let me relate what has taken place, and then I shall leave you to form your own conclusions.

"Three weeks ago, my dear parents, while walking in the park, I was accosted by a young man—a gentleman—handsome—noble—wealthy.

"He paid me many compliments, and we at last grew quite friendly. Before we parted, however, he most earnestly entreated me to keep secret what had taken place. I refused at first, but afterwards he persuaded me.

"I kept the interview a secret. I saw him again, and then he told me that he was titled and wealthy—that he loved me. But he had friends, he said, who would oppose our union, but that in a twelvemonth he should be his own master, and independent of the world.

"He pressed me to wed him—wed him secretly, and keep the marriage a secret for twelvemonths only. At the end of that time he would own me as a wife.

"Then he told me his name and rank, but adjured me to reveal it to no one.

"In fine, my dear parents, I have consented to wed him in the manner he proposes. For twelvemonths I must bid you adieu. When that period expires, you will see me again, happy, and the wife of one of England's greatest nobles.

"You will wonder much at this, my dear parents, and you cannot imagine how it damps my joy that you cannot be at present the sharers of my good fortune, but the time I speak of will soon pass away, and, until it does, I shall remain in the most absolute seclusion. I have promised that I will do so.

"By the time you read this, my dear parents, I shall be a bride, and with no other cloud upon my pure and perfect happiness than that which I fear your displeasure will cast.

"But pray pardon me and wait, and, in the end, you will see that all will turn out for the best.

"From your ever-loving daughter,

"ISABEL."

A deep groan was the only comment which was made to this letter, and that was uttered by the bereaved father.

We have chosen to give the letter in its entirety, and have not related the various interruptions which took place while it was being read.

The poor mother carried the paper to her lips, and kissed it.

What can exceed the love a mother has for her child?

"She is a poor angel," she sobbed. "It was very—very wrong of her to keep such a secret, and allow herself to be guided by her own inexperience."

"She deceived us," said the old man, with a slight tinge of bitterness in his words. "She deceived us."

"But who knows, John, what arguments may have been used. You cannot tell. She is wrong. She has sinned. But who is always right, and who is sinless?"

"True—true."

"Many excuses can be made for her, John. She never dreamt of doing harm, and never for a moment suspected the villain who lured her from her home. That year has passed away, and twelve more years beside. We have never heard of her during all that long—long weary time. What must have been her feelings when she discovered how cruelly she had been deceived? What may she not have suffered since, for she would have been afraid to come to us!"

"Peace—peace, Martha! You make me like a child."

Both wept.

"Where is she?" moaned the mother, again; "where has she been all this long time?"

"Heaven only knows."

"If her sin was great, her punishment has been adequate. But have you never thought, John, that we were much to blame?"

"No, I never thought that."

"But we were."

"How—how? I know your kind heart will make every excuse for her you can possibly think of."

"It is not that, John; but do you remember how we brought her up? We strove to keep her from all knowledge of evil."

"We did."

"And that was where we erred. Pure and stainless herself, she never dreamt there could be treachery in another, or, at all events, between a smooth and frank exterior."

"I see now—I see now."

"We ought to have taught her to distinguish evil from good, and shown her what a loathsome place the world was made through the influence of the bad passions of humanity."

"We ought, wife. I see the error now. We ought indeed."

"All the blame must not rest upon her, you know."

"You are right. I have done wrong, and added to my wrong doing. Would that I could recall the past. I would have had all England searched until I found her; but I was stubborn and obdurate."

"You could forgive her now if she came back?"

"Ah! yes, my dear wife; and, all through you, I see at last, when it is too late, that I alone am to blame."

"No—no."

"You would fain excuse me."

"None are perfect and—but hark!"

"What?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"Hark again."

"Did you hear something?"

"Yes."

"What, oh! what?"

"A moan as of some one in great pain."

"Heavens! wife! What can it mean? My heart beats strangely. Now I hear it."

A half-moaning cry from somewhere close at hand now came to their ears.

A presentiment was on the old man's mind that that sound had some connexion with their conversation.

There was the same impression upon the mind of Dick Turpin also.

"Wh—what is it—what is it, John?"

"I don't know, Martha. Hark!"

Again came the strange cry, but this time more wailingly than before.

"It comes from the street," said the mother, with bated breath; "it comes from the street."

"Let us go to the front door, Martha," added the old man, tremblingly; "let us go to the front door."

With these words on their lips, the aged couple slowly left the apartment hand in hand.

Ne sooner had they got fairly out of sight, than Turpin

looked out from the curtain, behind which he was concealed.

His face wore a serious look, such as had rarely before appeared upon it.

One could easily see how much he was affected by the simple and touching scene which he had witnessed.

But, interested as he was, the desire to get away rose paramount above it, and that is why, as soon as they had left the room, he looked out from the curtain.

He was, however, unable to see any means by which he could effect a retreat.

There was the sound of bolts being withdrawn and a lock shot back, for, of course, the door had been secured at night.

Then followed the creaking of hinges, which was echoed by a scream.

"What can it be?" asked Dick. "Ah, stop, I have an idea. How was it I did not think of that before?"

As he spoke, he slipped out of his place of concealment, and approached the table on tiptoe.

The lamp which the aged couple had carried was standing upon it, and burning brightly.

They had not carried it to the front door.

Familiar with the interior of their home as they were, there was no need for it.

The reader will, perhaps, guess what idea had entered Dick's mind.

It was to extinguish the lamp.

Under cover of the darkness, he would then stand a better chance of getting away unperceived.

He understood the mechanism of the lamp in an instant, and, by merely turning a screw, he put it out at once.

Then he stood profoundly still.

The darkness, contrasted with the previous light, seemed most intense—more so, indeed, than it was in reality.

"Bring her in, John," he heard a voice say. "Bring her in, poor dear thing. Who can she be? Perhaps it may be our own lost one come back to us, now that you have forgiven her."

"It is she!" cried the old man in a hysterical voice.

"It is she! I know it! I know it!"

"Come this way, then. Why—why——"

"What?"

"The lamp is out."

"Out?"

"Yes."

"How extraordinary."

"Quick, wife, quick. Light it again, and let us look upon our poor lost one! She moans! She knows me! She put her arms around my neck, and presses her cold lips against mine! Mercy! Mercy! My child! Bless you, my child! Bless you!"

The old lady made her way back into the room, and, as she did so, Dick stole out into the passage.

A gush of cold air came upon his face.

Before him he could see the open door, and, upon a nearer approach, the dim and half-defined outlines of some person on the door-step.

Cautiously he made his way towards it.

The old man, with what little strength he had, strove to raise some heavy burden.

Dick's heart, more than his eyes, told him that it was a female form.

The flash of light from the lamp which the poor mother had succeeded in igniting, now shone upon the wall.

Now was the time for action.

He was close to the door.

With one bound he sprang into the street, and, without pausing, ran hastily forwards, until he turned the first corner on his left.

CHAPTER CCXLIV.

DICK TURPIN OBTAINS A DISGUISE BY A SUMMARY PROCESS, AND DIRECTS HIS STEPS TO THE "WHITE HORSE" IN DRURY-LANE.

"This has been a night of adventure!" muttered Dick, as he looked around to see what direction he ought to take, "but this last incident affects me most. What a good-hearted couple! I should not have feared to have

thrown myself on their protection; but then, why should I bring care and trouble under their roof? They have borne enough already.

"What black-hearted wretch could it have been, I wonder, who, by his sophistic arguments, persuaded her to leave her happy home? The tale is a clear one to me, and not the least strange part about it is that, after a lapse of thirteen years of unforgiveness, as soon as her father pronounced her pardon, she had returned, as though the intelligence had been invisibly conveyed to her."

It will be seen by this speech that Dick jumped to the conclusion that the female form upon the doorstep was that of the erring and repentant daughter.

There were many things, certainly, to induce such a belief, but nothing amounting to a positive proof.

If she had returned just at that moment, the coincidence was a strange one.

And, although he had nothing to show it, Dick could not divest himself from the idea that the scene of which he had just been a spectator had some connection with the murder in the haunted house.

But whether this was so or not, time alone can evidence.

The morning was now close at hand, and a dull gray light seemed to fall upon all things and give them a cold and ghastly look.

By the aid, then, of this dim light, Dick looked about him.

To his relief, he could neither see nor hear anything of his foes.

But he was too close to the scene of his daring exploit to feel safe, and yet he hardly knew to what place to proceed.

Nor had he any distinct notion as to which would be the best direction for him to take.

He presented altogether a very suspicious appearance. His clothes were dirty and torn.

They were spotted with blood in many places, and over his shoulder was a crimson bandage.

He limped too, as he walked, for his ankle pained him exceedingly.

No doubt, by this time, a pretty accurate description of him had been posted all over London.

People would be on the look out.

He would feel safer at the "White Horse" than anywhere, but then how was he to reach that place unobserved, and morning fast coming on?

Old Matthew's roof would only afford him a safe asylum if he was not seen to enter it.

When he reached this point in his reflections, he heard a footstep approaching him.

Desirous to escape the observation of every one as much as possible, he shrunk back into the deep shadow of a projecting doorway.

It might be a mere chance passenger who was coming, and it might be a foe.

He looked in the direction from which the traveller came, and in a little while distinguished him.

He was walking at a rapid rate.

As he drew yet nearer, Dick saw there was a certain military air about him, both in respect to his walk and upright bearing.

A long black cloak which he wore tended materially to favour the idea.

It completely enveloped his form, and allowed only his boot-tops to be visible.

On his head was the almost universally-worn, three-cornered felt hat.

As he saw this person approaching, and noticed how completely the cloak covered his form, hiding everything he wore, the idea struck him of what a capital thing it would be for him if he could obtain a similar piece of apparel.

No sooner had this thought struck him, than he determined to possess himself of the very identical cloak which the comer wore.

He was upon the same side of the way as Dick was, and in a few minutes would pass the doorway in which he was concealed.

But to take anything from so warlike a person would, most likely, be no easy matter.

Dick, however, was not the man to trouble himself much about that.

He wanted the cloak, and he made up his mind he would have it, and that by boldness, too.

He felt rapidly for what weapons he had about him, but found the only thing he had got was a discharged pistol.

His sword had been broken.

But if the pistol was harmless, his enemy need not know it.

Grasping it firmly in his right hand, he waited.

The stranger, not dreaming of an ambuscade, walked on unconcerned.

But, as soon as he was close enough, Dick sprang from his hiding-place, and, with unerring aim, caught him round the throat.

"Silence!" cried Dick, impressively, almost before the stranger knew he was attacked. "Silence! Utter a cry, or do anything to cause an alarm, and you are a dead man."

A gurgling sound followed these words, and Dick, fearful if he continued the pressure, his adversary would choke, relaxed his grasp a little.

At the same time, he pressed the muzzle of the pistol against the stranger's cheeks, and said:

"I want your cloak. Give it to me without resistance, or you die. Your life now hangs upon a thread. I am a desperate man, and shall not shrink to take it."

The stranger endeavoured to nod his head.

"If you mean you are willing to let me have what I require, be it so. But beware how you play me false. No violence will then be offered. The cloak is all I require. It is of little value to you, so give it up at once. If you are treacherous your death be on your own head."

As he spoke, Dick relaxed his hold.

But as he did so, he very dexterously unclasped the cloak, and, catching the garment from the stranger's shoulders, threw it over his own person.

"Now, sir," said Dick, "you are free. I am much obliged to you, and, if you wish to know to whom you have lent your cloak, it is to Richard—commonly called Dick—Turpin, the highwayman."

Then, ere the military-looking individual could recover his surprise, Dick hurried down the street, and was quickly out of sight.

He found the cloak was of first-rate material, and such as would be worn by any gentleman.

He adjusted it properly, and fastened it at the throat.

It was trimmed with fur, and made very full, so that he could completely wrap himself up in it.

Everything now that would have made him an object of suspicion was hidden from observation.

He walked along rapidly.

The streets were all but empty.

At the dawning hour few people are abroad.

Suddenly, upon emerging from a narrow street, he found himself close to Westminster Abbey.

"I will make my way to the river-side," he said, "and take a boat from thence to the Savoy-steps. That will suit me first-rate. I shall get to old Matthew's without any one being the wiser; and glad enough I shall be, for a little rest would be about as welcome a thing as I could think of."

With these words on his lips, Dick took the direction upon which he had determined.

The nearest point at which he could make sure of finding a boat was at the foot of Westminster-bridge; so it was towards that venerable and almost forgotten structure that he made his way.

A few minutes enabled him to reach it, and, descending a flight of stone steps on the east side of the bridge, made slippery by the recession of the tide, he saw before him several boats waiting to be hired.

He was quickly hailed by one of the watermen, who were always anxious, like cabmen are now, to have a well-dressed, distinguished-looking person for a fare.

With all possible speed, Dick stepped into one of the little vessels, and ordered him to row him to the Savoy-steps.

The usual "Ay, ay, sir," followed his command, and pushing off from the steps, the waterman, by his long, steady strokes, made the boat glide over the surface of the river at a rapid rate.

The tide, too, was running out, which made their progress all the easier and swifter.

But when the prow of the boat touched against the Savoy-steps and Dick leaped from the boat, it was broad daylight.

Taking care to draw the cloak closely around his form, and pulling his hat down over his face as much as possible, Dick took the shortest and most direct route to the "White Horse."

He saw no signs of pursuit, and nothing that looked suspicious, but for all that he did not relax his caution. Upon second thoughts, however, he determined not to go to the front door, so he made a bit of a detour, and got into Stanhope-street.

Then, turning to the left, he entered the narrow passage which even now exists, and which is known as White Horse-yard.

Straight up to the secret door he went, and pressed upon the hidden spring, which sounded a bell in the interior. He had hardly to wait a moment before the door opened.

Old Matthew, in a state of the greatest uneasiness, had been on the watch for him, and his joy may be imagined when he found him standing there safe and sound.

"Come in," he cried. "Don't linger. Quick! There may be prying eyes about."

Dick stepped in at once.

The moment, however, that the door was closed, and before old Matthew had time to speak, he said—

"Black Bess! Where is she?"

"Safe, quite safe."

"Let me see her first, and I will tell you my adventures afterwards."

"As you will. This way. I never thought to see you back again!"

"Yet here I am."

"Yes, here you are, and more by good luck than anything else, I take it."

"I daresay that has a great deal to do with it, my friend."

CHAPTER CCXLV.

MR. WIGGLES TAKES HIS MEASURES FOR CAPTURING DICK TURPIN, AND SEIZES HIM IN STANHOPE-STREET.

"Ah! well," ejaculated the worthy landlord, as he threw open the cunningly-contrived stable door, "luck is a very fine thing, that's certain!"

"You are right."

"But, however, here's your mare. Woe, Bess!"

The landlord patted the noble creature affectionately on the neck.

Dick, too, approached, and a faint neigh proclaimed that he was recognised.

Of course, she was quite safe and properly attended to.

Old Matthew had seen to her himself.

But Dick always felt it to be a great satisfaction to know, from personal inspection, that such was the case.

The landlord was exceedingly impatient to hear Turpin's adventures, so he hurried him off at once into the bar-parlour, where a good fire was burning, and where the landlord had been sitting awaiting his return.

To satisfy him, then, Dick briefly gave him an outline of the incidents which have been already presented to the reader in detail.

As soon as he spoke of his hurts, however, the landlord insisted upon having them dressed, so he took Dick upstairs to a bedroom, and attended to them himself, for he had an excellent knowledge of all kinds of wounds, and knew how they should be treated.

When this was over, the highwayman was completely exhausted, and laid down upon the bed to enjoy a few hours' rest and sleep.

"Don't be afraid," old Matthew said. "If anything goes wrong you shall have the alarm soon enough. Trust me for that."

"Many thanks."

"Oh! don't mention it. A good sleep is the best thing you could possibly have, and when you wake up you will find something to eat beside you."

"All right."

"I shall go and have a turn in myself for a little while."

"I should think you want it."

"I do, though, if you will believe me, I don't take so much sleep as some do. I don't require it."

"Ah, well, my friend, I can go to sleep here in security, I know. Good morning."
The landlord left the room.
Dick turned over and over upon his bed.
Somehow, although he was so exhausted, he could not sleep.

His brain was busy.

It was occupied with many distracting things.

There was his night's adventures, his failure in what he had undertaken, Tom King and his absent comrades, all running one after another through his mind.

At length he fell off to sleep, nor did he wake until the short winter's day was drawing to a close.

As the landlord had said, he found beside him both eatables and drinkables.

To these he paid the first attention.

Then, having satisfied the cravings of hunger, he saw that his old friend had been thoughtful enough to provide him with a new suit of clothes, which were hanging on a chair-back at the bedside.

The highwayman then rose.

His wound was well bandaged, and the hemorrhage had entirely ceased.

He had nothing to do now but to let it take its course.

Having thoroughly washed himself, and gone through the various operations of the toilet, the change that he effected in himself was great indeed.

Indeed, he looked as he had looked of old, as he looked upon that November night when we first introduced him to the reader.

Before he had quite finished attiring himself, old Matthew made his appearance.

He was delighted with the change.

"Is all safe?" was Dick's first question.

"Quite, I think."

"You think?"

"Yes, there is a deuce of a hubbub about you!"

"About me?"

"Your name is in everybody's mouth."

"The devil!"

"You may well say that. If you want to save your neck, you'll have to keep yourself remarkably snug."

Dick smiled.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Do you see how carefully I have dressed myself?"

"Yes."

"And what pains I have taken with my toilet?"

"Yes, yes."

"And what do you think induced me to do so?"

"I don't know."

"You don't?"

"Had you any special reason?"

"I had."

"What was it?"

"This, my friend: Black Bess is all right."

"Eh! what?"

"Of course she is. Well, Matthew, my friend, I am going out for a ride into the country."

"No—no."

"But I say, yes—yes."

"You must be mad!"

"Why so?"

"You will be captured, to a certainty."

"I will take my risk of that. Now, Matthew, you have known me some time, and so you must have noticed one thing."

"What?"

"That when I take an idea into my head, or make up my mind to do anything, nothing in the world will turn me."

"I do know it, but pray for once listen to reason."

"Not if it means stop here."

"Why not?"

"I want a ride out in the free open air. I want to feel that I am once more a knight of the road. The adventures I had last night have whetted my appetite, and I am determined to see some more to-night."

"Well, well—a wilful man will always have his own way."

"Now, Matthew, don't be offended."

"I am not offended."

"Just consider. The authorities, knowing this to be an old haunt of mine, may take it into their heads to search the place thoroughly from top to bottom, and

so, for your sake, as well as my own, it will be best to be out of it."

"Yes, but——"

"Now, Matthew, will you oblige me? I ask you as a friend."

The landlord groaned as he said it.

"I know what you want."

"That's all right, then."

"You want your mare saddled."

"I do, but not just yet. Say, in an hour's time. It will be quite dark by then."

"So it will, and, in the meantime, just think over what you are going to do."

"Oh! all right. Never fear. Go and get the saddle on at once, and then all will be ready in case of an alarm."

The landlord, finding further remonstrance would be useless, unwillingly withdrew to do our hero's bidding.

The hour he had mentioned soon passed away.
As he had said, it had during that space of time grown quite dark.

And now the use of the iron bars in the wall was displayed.

Had Dick gone down the staircase, he would surely have met some one.

But as it was, the square yard we have before described was never entered by any one but the landlord and those he could trust.

It was impossible for any persons in the neighbouring houses to see into it.

Dick threw open the window, and took hold of one of the horizontal bars.

Then, placing his feet on another, he closed the window and begun to descend.

This was the easiest matter imaginable, for the bars were arranged so as to be just like the rounds of a ladder, and could be ascended and descended with equal facility.

In a moment or two Dick reached the ground.

Then he bent his steps towards the stables.

There he found old Matthew examining the trappings of Black Bess, and seeing that all was perfectly secure.

He made one more attempt to induce Dick to derelict his enterprise, but he met with no better success than he had the first time.

When all was ready, Matthew furnished Dick with six pistols.

Two were for the holsters in the saddle.

Two he placed in his belt ready for immediate service. The other two in his coat-pocket.

He loaded them with his own hands, and placed the remainder of the ammunition in his pocket also.

Old Matthew then opened a door which led into a narrow passage.

"Take the bridle in your hand," he said, "and walk to the bottom of the place, and you will find yourself in Stanhope-street. I trust I shall see you safe back again."

"Never fear for that," said Dick. "Good-bye."

As he spoke, he obeyed old Matthew's instructions, and passed the court—for such it was, though no other doors opened into it.

Twenty steps took him to the bottom of it.

He led Bess out into the middle of the street, and prepared to mount.

But, before he placed his foot in the stirrup, he felt himself seized from behind by some one.

Releasing his hold of his mare, he wrenched himself round.

But the person who had caught hold of him kept a firm grasp, while he shouted out:

"I have him! I have him, Mr. Wiggles! Mr. Wiggles, I've got him! Make haste! Here he is!"

A sudden tramping of footsteps followed these words.

Dick knew his danger at once. It was imminent. His old foes had got scent of where he was, and had waited till he came out to pounce upon him.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

RELATES HOW DICK TURPIN FARED AT THE HANDS OF MR. WRIGGLES, THE BOW-STREET OFFICER.

HIS only chance of escaping being overpowered by numbers, was by at once disabling the man who had seized him.

Summoning, therefore, all his strength, he wrenched his whole body round, and so got out of his grasp.



[MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS ATTACK DICK TURPIN.]

But only for a moment.

The man would not be shook off, and he clung to him again.

Turpin, however, struck him a heavy blow in the face, which made him stagger slightly, while his grasp slackened.

Dick struck him again, and this time more violently than before.

He fell to the ground stunned.

But by the time he had done this, the highwayman's foes were close upon him.

Mr. Wriggles, so soon as he heard that the famous Dick Turpin had again made his appearance in his old character, had not attempted to give chase to him in any way, having already learned the futility of doing so.

Without any precise information upon the point, he had an idea that he would most likely take up his quarters at the "White Horse," his old place of refuge in days past.

Old Matthew, the landlord, however, always managed, somehow or other, to get the better of the officers

That is to say, if they went in to search for any one, they always had their trouble for nothing.

No member of the family had ever been found there.

Mr. Wriggles had from time to time experienced all this, so he adopted quite a different plan of action.

At various convenient places he had stationed his men, so that a complete circle was formed by them round the ancient inn.

Here he resolved to wait and watch.

If Turpin came, he could not enter without being perceived, and if he was in already, it was impossible for him to leave also.

But he almost did so, too, for the door leading from the stables into the narrow passage was quite unknown to the officers as being a means of exit.

One of them, however, who happened to be posted at the bottom or east end of White Horse-yard, heard the trampling of Bess's feet, and saw her rider lead her into the road.

He then darted forward and clasped Dick round from

behind, while he called out to his superior for assistance in the manner we have related.

Upon hearing his voice, they had hurried forward at the top of their speed, and arrived just in time to see their comrade stretched at full length on the ground.

Turpin, however, the moment he had freed himself from his adversary, drew his sword from its sheath.

It was a long-bladed and beautiful weapon, which old Matthew had placed by the side of the apparel he then wore.

Its brightly-polished blade flashed like lightning as, the moment it was released from the scabbard, Dick whirled it round his head.

The officers, who had been advancing, halted, and drew back a step.

And during this scene Black Bess had not moved from her master's side.

She stood immovable as a rook, watching the progress of the fray.

The indecision of the officers was only momentary.

At a word from their leader, they made a rush forward.

But Turpin waved his sword again, describing a semi-circle with it.

None of his foes were within its circumference, or they would have been mown down.

Now was Turpin's time.

Taking advantage of the temporary supremacy he had gained over them, he turned with great swiftness towards his mare.

Then giving one spring, he leapt upon her back, at the same time uttering a cry which he knew would have the effect of making her bound forward at her utmost speed.

A yell came from the officers.

Up to the present, in obedience to the instructions they had received from their superior, they had not fired.

His design had been to capture the celebrated highwayman alive, and hand him over to the authorities, to be dealt with according to law.

But now he found he was slipping away from him, Mr. Wriggles gave the order to fire.

The officers, who had not been in time to cling to Dick after he had mounted, though several had rushed forward to do so, at once drew their pistols from their belts, and many shots were fired in quick succession.

But Turpin, having heard the command, did not waver. He set his teeth hard, and struck Black Bess with his heels.

She flew along the narrow and deserted street at a terrific speed.

Its length was trifling, and he was round the corner into Lincoln's Inn-fields in the space of a few seconds.

His foes, however, raised a tremendous outcry, and followed him on foot as fast as they were able.

But the danger was now passed.

Or nearly so.

Dick had not expected to escape injury from the many shots that were fired at him.

To be sure all would, in the excitement of the moment, be discharged almost without aim, but even so, some chance bullet could scarcely fail to reach him.

Feeling no immediate effects from it, he did not stay his course, but made his way in a direct line to Bloomsbury-fields.

Here he drew rein, having ascertained that none of his enemies were within sight or hearing.

His first act was to move himself about in various ways, and exercise all his limbs, in order to learn whether he had been struck.

But the result was more than he could have hoped for. He had not received a scratch.

Having assured himself of this, he patted his mare upon the neck in a cheerful manner, as he said:

"Well done, lass! well done! We are all right, and Wriggles is again defeated! Now, I once more feel myself a real Knight of the Road, and it is odd to me, if I do not do something to-night which shall serve to prove my right to the title. Bravo! bravo!"

Black Bess made a neighing sound as soon as these words were uttered, which almost seemed as though the gallant creature had made an effort to speak.

Turpin did not take it in that manner.

It was not the way in which she usually replied to him when he spoke encouragingly to her.

His face assumed a serious expression.

The sound to his ears sounded like one of pain.

Could it be possible?

Had the matchless animal been less fortunate than her rider when the pistols had been discharged?

Some stray bullet might have struck her.

Might even have reached some vital part.

With his heart much agitated by this thought, Dick alighted from the saddle.

"Art hurt, lass?" he asked, anxiously, stroking his hand over her glossy coat as he spoke. "Art hurt, lass—eh? What's this?"

Dick held up his hand, and in the dim night light he could see that it was smeared with blood.

He quickly found the place from which the blood had come.

There was a wound upon her rroup.

Whether it was a very serious one or not he could not tell.

The blood flowed from it at rather a rapid rate, though, now she was standing still, it was fast beginning to coagulate over it.

He did not try to stop this operation, because he knew when completed, that it would be a more effectual means of stanching it than any other.

The matter was a very serious one indeed, but it was most fortunate for both that the officers had not been well mounted, or the result would perhaps have been the capture or death of both horse and rider.

Dick was at a loss for a little while to know what to do.

Where could he take his mare to have her wound attended to, and what should he do in the meantime without her?

These were puzzling questions.

But it is surprising how much quicker we arrive at a decision when pressed by time, when we know there is no time for a lengthened argument pro and con.

Dick had to make up his mind quickly.

But just at that moment he heard a faint jingling of bells, accompanied by the rumbling of heavy wheels.

"A waggon," said Dick, as he heard the sound.

"Perhaps I shall learn something from the driver if I wait until it comes up."

Acting upon this idea, he took Black Bess by the bridle and led her to the side of the road, where he waited somewhat impatiently for the approach of the waggon.

It came crawling on at a snail's pace, as such vehicles usually do.

It was coming from the direction of London.

At length, when the highwayman's stock of patience was quite exhausted, it arrived.

He could just see that it was drawn by three horses; on the head of the foremost of which were some little bells, which jingled pleasantly as the horse tossed his head up and down.

"Hoy!" shouted Turpin, at the top of his lungs; "ho! Stop!"

But the driver did not appear to take any notice.

Dick shouted again, but without further effect; so, lest the waggon should pass him after having waited for it so long as he had, he loosed the bridle, and springing forward, caught the foremost horse in the team, and made him come to a standstill.

The others, of course, stopped also, and the huge heavy wheels ceased to revolve.

A voice now cried out:

"Gee—woa—whoop! Dang it, who hix thee stopping my horse?"

The voice belonged to the driver, who had been sitting on his seat fast asleep, which accounted for his not hearing Dick when he called out to him.

Indeed, it was the cessation of motion which caused him to open his eyes.

Nothing else, hardly, would have had that effect.

"Stop," said Dick; "I want to speak to you."

"Speak, be dom'd," said the driver, in a rage, and making a slashing out at Dick, as he uttered the words.

"Speak, be dom'd! What do ye mean by a stopping a my team?"

"Look here," said Dick, "do you see this?"

"See what?"

"A crown piece."

"Eh!" said the driver, forgetting his anger in the interest he took in what had been last said.

"A crown piece," said Turpin. "Listen a moment, and it is yours."

"All right, your honour, all right. What did you please to want?"

"Do you travel this road often?"

"Twice a week."

"Then you know it pretty well."

"Yes, I do. But what o' that?"

"My horse here has met with an accident. Now, where is the nearest place I can get a doctor?"

"What sort of a doctor do you want?"

"Why a horse-doctor, to be sure. There must be one not far off, I should think."

"Well, there is, certainly. Is your horse much hurt?"

"Well, yes; rather."

"Ah!"

"Why do you ask?"

"It's a matter of four miles further along the road."

"The devil it is! The way you are going?"

"Yes."

"Shall you pass anywhere near it?"

"Of course I shall."

"Very well, then, I'll make the crown piece half-a-guinea if you'll give me and my mare a lift as far as there."

"Will you, by gom?"

"I will. Is the waggon empty?"

"Yes, barring some straw at the bottom of it."

"That's the very thing."

"But, how can I give your mare a lift?"

"I'll show you. Stop a minute."

The man looked round with great curiosity, and Dick went to the back part of the waggon.

Jumping up on the board at the back, he drew back the tarpaulin which hung there.

Then he called to Black Bess by means of the peculiar whistle which he had so particularly taught her to obey.

She came towards him at once.

He patted her on the neck, and made her understand that he wished her to leap up.

This she did easily, for the distance from the ground to the bottom of the cart was nothing to speak of.

One bound, and she was fairly inside.

The waggoner was filled with astonishment.

He had lifted the canvas at the front of the cart, and so was able to see into the interior, which was lighted by a small oil lamp.

"Dom me," he said, "that licks all I ever seed in my life."

Dick patted Bess on the neck, and gently forced her to lie down, for he imagined she would travel easier in that manner.

Having accomplished this, he went to the front of the waggon, and said—

"Now drive as fast as you can, and the sooner you get to where I want to go, the more liberal I shall be."

"All right, your honour," replied the driver, smacking his whip, so that it sounded like the report of a pistol. "Come up, with you."

The horses put themselves in motion at once.

They went at first at a kind of trot, but that jolted the waggon in such a fearful manner that Dick could not stand it, so they subsided into a walk.

The cumbersome affair did not go more than four miles an hour, at about the end of which time the driver pulled up, and said—

"Here you are, sir. You'll find the door a little way down the lane there to the right."

"Very good," said the highwayman. "Who shall I ask for?"

"Mr. Evans."

"Here's a guinea, then, for your trouble, and as soon as I get out, drive on, and the best thing you can do is to forget this night's work."

With this, Turpin scrambled out of the back of the waggon, and assisted Bess to follow him.

The waggoner, pleased enough with what he had so unexpectedly earned, and which was about equal to two weeks' wages, seemed to take Dick's advice, for he drove off at once.

Our hero watched him down the road until he was out of sight, and then he looked about him for the lane of which the man had spoken.

Sure enough, just on his right hand was a narrow turning.

Down this Dick Turpin did not hesitate to direct his steps.

He was glad to see that his priceless mare did not exhibit any outward signs of her hurt. She walked along steadily and firmly.

According as he had been told, he found, a few yards down the lane, some large double gates, which were surmounted by a circular piece of wood for a sign-board, upon which some words were written, but it was too dark for them to be deciphered.

Nor did Dick make the attempt. He merely gave a glance upward to see what kind of place it looked to be.

A little search showed him a handle by the side of the gate-post, and this he pulled downwards.

The loud clanging of a bell not far off from where he stood immediately ensued, followed by the barking of dogs.

Then he heard a heavy footstep, and a voice cried—

"Who is it? What do you want?"

Dick paid no attention to the first part of the question.

"I want to see Mr. Evans. I have hurt my horse. Open the door. Be quick."

The authoritative and off-hand manner in which he spoke, procured immediate obedience.

One half of the gate was thrown open, and a man appeared holding a stable-lantern as high above his head as he could, in order to see what the late customer was like.

CHAPTER CCKLVII.

DICK TURPIN HAS BLACK BESS'S WOUNDS PROPERLY ATTENDED TO.

DICK TURPIN, however, by no means wished to be chosen, scrutinized, be the man whom he might, so he walked forward, leading his mare by the bridle.

The man drew aside to allow him to pass, and closed the door after him.

No one was better aware of the policy of conciliating people wherever it was possible, by giving them money, than our hero. He always looked upon it as money well and profitably spent.

Accordingly, while the man was fastening the gate, he took the opportunity to draw half-a-crown from his pocket.

"I don't want to waste any more time than I can possibly help," he said, placing the coin in the man's hand. "Just ask Mr. Evans to make as much haste as he can."

"All right, sir!" said the man, touching his hat, and quite certain in his own mind that Dick was a gentleman, and consequently a customer well worth having. "He will be here in a minute, I know."

"The sooner the better. You can tell him from me that he will be well paid for his trouble."

The man hurried off to do his bidding.

Nor did he keep him long, for he soon returned, accompanied by a tall, gaunt old man, who had much of the appearance of having served in the army.

This idea was confirmed in Dick's mind by the kind of semi-military salute he made as he approached him.

Turpin spoke to him in an undertone.

"Are you a man content to do a service and be well paid for it, without troubling yourself unnecessarily about it, because, if such is the case, you can have such a job to do now."

Mr. Evans hesitated a moment, and then he replied—

"What is the nature of the service which you wish me to perform?"

"Nothing which you need shrink from doing."

"You must tell me what it is before I can give you a reply."

"It is simply this. You see my horse here?"

"Yes."

"Well, she has been hurt."

"Go on, sir."

"Are you willing to dress the wound she has received, without troubling about how she got it, and where and when?"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Evans. "That is a matter which don't concern me, and I always endeavour, as much

as possible, to act up to the principle of every man minding his own business, and letting other people's alone."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Turpin, "very glad indeed. You are just the man I want. Now you shall be well rewarded, especially if you do your business well and carefully, for, I can assure you, I set great store by the animal."

"Just so, sir," said Mr. Evans.

"Have you any objection?"

"None in the least."

"Then perhaps you will have a good look at her wound, and do the best you can for it."

"You may depend upon that, sir. Here, Ike, lend me the lantern."

The man had stood a little aside during the dialogue, but upon hearing his master speak, he approached.

Mr. Evans took the lantern from his hands, and, by the aid of its light, made a good examination of Black Bess.

Turpin looked himself, for, in the darkness in the road, he could not say for certain that the wound he had discovered was the only one which she had received.

But such proved to be the case.

The blood had coagulated on her croup in a large mass. But it had ceased to flow.

Mr. Evans evidently looked upon it with surprise.

"Will you follow me under cover," he said, turning to Dick. "Perhaps you would like to lead your horse yourself."

"I should."

"Then, if you will keep beside me, I will take you to my room, where all my things are kept, and where she can be properly attended to."

Turpin did not scruple to follow Mr. Evans. He would not have hesitated if he had known for certain that he was incurring great danger by so doing.

Indeed, it is hard to say what risk he would not have run upon his mare's account. Certainly more than he would for any other living thing.

He had not far to go, for Mr. Evans merely led him across a small yard to a door leading into a shed.

This he opened and passed through, with Dick close at his heels.

"Ike!" he cried to his man, "run into the house, and fetch a bucket of hot water."

The man went off, and nothing could be done until he returned.

But he scarcely kept them a moment.

Mr. Evans took a sponge, and, dipping it in the hot water, washed away the blood which had caked over the wound.

He continued this bathing process for some time, and then Dick saw that a bullet had ploughed up the skin on her croup, making an oblique furrow about three inches in length.

Mr. Evans looked at the wound, but, in accordance with his agreement, made no remarks and asked no questions.

No doubt he knew what had caused it.

"This must be sown up," he said.

"Is it anything serious?"

"No, not at all. You see it is merely skin deep."

"I see."

"So that all that will be necessary will be to draw the skin together. It will heal all the quicker then."

"Let it be done if that is best," said Dick.

"Oh! I will do it at once."

"Shall you be long?"

"No, a few minutes only."

"I am glad to hear it."

"The bleeding, you perceive, has quite ceased. I will try to do something that will prevent it breaking out afresh."

"It is in a good place."

"Well, yes, so far as travelling goes, it is in a good place."

"There will not be any fear of its coming unstitched, will there?"

"I should recommend you to be careful."

"You may depend I shall be."

"There is no occasion for putting her aside for such a hurt, but it would do her no harm."

"It shall be done if possible. I value her very highly."

"She is a beautiful creature," said Mr. Evans, admiringly; "a very beautiful creature."

"She is indeed."

During this conversation Mr. Evans very carefully stitched the edges of the wound together, and when he had done, there was very little of the wound to be seen.

Dick then gave Mr. Evans five guineas for the service he had done, and the horse-doctor was not a little surprised at receiving so liberal a payment, although, from what Dick had said, he expected something handsome.

A second examination was made, in order to ascertain for certain that she had received no other injury, but the result was quite satisfactory.

Bess was then led to the front gate by which she had entered, and Dick Turpin, with a heart considerably lightened, trotted her gently out into the high-road.

What the speculations of Mr. Evans and his man were does not matter. He kept to his part of the bargain, and so did Dick to his.

But when Turpin had given him the five guineas, he found that was nearly all the money he possessed.

This was a state of things which could not be permitted to continue.

"Gently, Bess," he said, as his mare made an attempt to break into a gallop, "gently, Bess. You shall not go fast to-night, if I can help it; and certainly not without there is some urgent reason for it."

It was clear, however, from the manner in which she moved, that Bess felt very little, if any, effects of her wound, which fortunately had happened where it would not interfere with her motion.

Her rider would only allow her to proceed at a very gentle pace.

Money he had resolved to have, and an adventure, too, and he would not be balked of either, if possible.

He so went on for several miles.

The night was dark and cold, and as he got further and further into the country so did the coldness appear to increase.

The moon was not shining—or, at any rate, was not visible, though there were some indications of her presence behind a cloud on the eastern horizon.

The road was quite deserted, and Dick was beginning to despair of meeting any one that night, when the sharp strokes of a horse's hoofs beating upon the hard road met his ears.

He drew aside and waited.

The traveller, which he could tell immediately was a man mounted on a steed of good quality, came on at a rapid pace, so only a few minutes elapsed before he was up with him.

As soon as he saw his horse's head was on a level with him, Turpin darted out of his place of concealment with a cocked pistol in his right hand.

He galloped for a few yards side by side with the horse-man, while he cried—

"Pull up your horse, sir. Halt! I say, and that at once, or you are a dead man. My finger is already on the trigger, and the muzzle of the pistol not more than a foot from your head. Halt, I say!"

Thus forcibly persuaded, and dreading to lose his life, the traveller, with a bitter oath, reined in his steed.

At the same moment he plunged his hand into the breast of his coat.

Turpin saw the movement, and before he could withdraw it, he clapped his pistol to his forehead, and cried—

"Move that hand, and I fire. Do you understand me? The muzzle is against your face: can you feel it?"

He pressed more heavily as he spoke, until the pistol made quite a dent in the traveller's forehead.

"Now," he continued, "you have a weapon of some sort or other handy to your grasp. Fling it in the roadway this moment if you wish to preserve your life."

"You have the advantage of me," cried the traveller, "and I am forced to submit. Besides, I place too high a value on my life to throw it away upon the high-road."

"I am glad to hear it," said Turpin. "Down with your weapon! Remember, I shall keep a sharp eye upon you, and if I see anything that looks in the least suspicious, I fire—so I would advise you to be careful!"

The traveller could tell by the firm, cool, and decided way in which Turpin spoke that he was quite in earnest in what he said, so he, without further delay, drew a pistol from his breast, and immediately threw it in the road.

"Now the other!" cried Dick. "Quick! A gentle-

man like you would not think of travelling without a brace. Down with the other!"

The traveller gnashed his teeth, but he had no resource save to submit, so he threw down another pistol.

This showed Dick was quite right when he said a gentleman like him would not think of travelling with less than a brace.

"So far, sir, very good," said the highwayman. "Now, you will find it your best policy not to tamper with me. You are completely in my power, and if you do not wish to throw your life away, you will attempt no useless resistance, but hand me over whatever cash and valuables you have about you."

"You take this matter very coolly," said the traveller, with great difficulty controlling his anger.

"Very coolly," replied Dick, "and I trust you will be influenced by my example. It is so much better to carry out these little affairs quietly, and without making a disturbance."

"Curse your quietness. Here, take this, and be off."

The horseman held out at arm's length a good-sized purse, which Dick could see was tolerably well filled.

"I will take the purse," he said, "but as for being off, that is quite another thing. I shall want something more in remembrance of this pleasant interview before I go. Come, let me have your watch and chain and the appendages thereto. I am sure you carry one. Come, be quick!"

With another oath the traveller took off his watch and chain, and handed it to the highwayman, who then said—

"You may go now. Good evening, sir. I am much obliged to you, and I shall always look back to this meeting with gratification."

"Curse you, yes," and as he uttered the words, the horseman stuck his spurs deeply into his steed's flanks, and galloped away.

With a gratified air, Dick Turpin felt his booty, and estimated its value by its weight.

"Not a bad commencement," he muttered; "but still not enough to be called a night's work. I must go on, there is plenty of time yet, and see what fate has in store for me."

Still he went slowly. There was no particular occasion for hurry.

Presently he saw before him some obstruction in the road, which a nearer approach and a closer observation showed him was a toll-gate.

It was closed.

He rode up to it gently, and the man came out of his wooden house and lazily swung open half the gate.

"Tuppence," he said, holding up a piece of white paper.

"Tuppence."

"Here you are."

"Why, this is half-a-crown."

"All right. Keep that on account of next time, for I may, perhaps, be in a hurry, and, if so, it won't do for me to have to wait while you fumble at the gate."

"Lor' bless you, your honour, no. I understands you. Long life to you. I'll take care you don't have to wait at my gate."

"All right," said Turpin. "Good night."

CHAPTER CXXLVIII.

A VERY REMARKABLE ADVENTURE BEFALLS POOR TURPIN ON THE HIGH-ROAD.

It was always good policy for a highwayman to keep on good terms with the tollmen. They were in a position sometimes to render them a good deal of assistance.

This sufrage was in a general way easily obtained by behaving liberally to them.

Dick could mention more than one instance when he would have had much difficulty in eluding his pursuers, had it not been for a tollman hindering the officers two or three minutes while he undid the gate to allow them to pass through.

The speed of his mare was matchless beyond doubt, but then it had a limit, and, after awhile, her swiftness would abate materially.

Those behind might be indifferently mounted, but every now and then they would get more cattle, so it was only by stratagem that a highwayman had a chance of getting out of their clutches.

A delay of two or three minutes from any little circumstance, would be of immense importance.

After passing through the toll-gate, Dick still kept on towards the country and away from London, which was now about ten miles behind him.

The road was broad, level, and straight, and, when the moon broke forth, he was able to see a long way in advance.

In the far distance he could just see two tiny lights.

They were no larger than stars, or rather, looked like two glowworms.

Both were on a level with each other, and about equidistant.

Of course Turpin knew in a moment what those two lights signified.

A carriage was approaching.

If he had any doubt, the rumbling sound which soon followed would have convinced him, and, not only that, the lights, while preserving precisely the same position, continued to grow brighter and brighter.

Dick changed his mare's pace from a trot to a walk.

The carriage was coming at a very rapid rate, as though its inmates had some more than usual motive for travelling post haste.

But whatever their business might be, or however great a hurry they might be in, Dick resolved to stop them and exact a tribute.

And now the lamps shone very brightly, and showed him the forms of two steaming horses, who were harnessed to the carriage.

Dick had learned from experience that one of the most effectual methods of making the driver of a carriage stop his horses, was to fire a pistol in the air, and then cry out "Halt!"

This was the course he pursued on the present occasion.

"Bang!" went his pistol, with a report that echoed far and wide over the country, accompanied by a momentary flash of intense brilliancy, which revealed his form to the driver of the coach.

"Halt!" he cried. "Halt! or you are a dead man."

There is something remarkable about the word "halt!" Clearly enunciated, it seems to have a magical effect in arresting any one's progress.

In the present instance, its effect was heightened by the words which followed it.

The coachman stopped at once, and without any trouble brought his cattle to a standstill.

It almost seemed as though they understood the meaning of the abrupt tone of command.

The stoppage was immediately followed by a scream in a female voice, and before Turpin could reach the carriage, the door was thrown open, and a young lady alighted.

Dick could see at a glance that she was young, and, not only that, the moon's rays showed him that she was beautiful.

This was an action which astonished Dick not a little.

The young lady, the moment her feet touched the ground, ran towards him, and cried out, in the sweetest voice our hero had ever heard—

"Tell me—tell me! Who are you? What is your name? Tell me, I implore you! It is of the greatest importance to me. I guess it, but tell me your name."

She clasped her hands together as she spoke, and sank into a half-kneeling attitude.

Under the sudden impulse of the moment, Dick slipped off his mare, and tried to raise the young lady to her feet. But she sank quite down into a kneeling posture, and said, anxiously—

"Tell me—tell me who you are! Do not delay, I pray you! Tell me your name!"

"I cannot refuse you," replied Turpin, "but I should first like to know your reasons for wishing to learn my name before I give it."

"No—no! that will take too long. No—no, tell me your name. Tell me at once."

"Rise, then, to your feet. Let me assist you."

"Not until you have told me your name. I more than suspect who you are, but tell me—pray tell me for certain."

Dick hesitated.

In the first place, the whole transaction was of so extraordinary a nature, that he may be excused if he felt rather confused.

He was at a loss to understand what was meant.

When he had alighted and endeavoured to raise the young lady to her feet, he had released his hold of his mare's bridle, and she had, after straying a few paces onward, commenced cropping some of the short sweet grass which grew upon the roadside.

Dick had only given one glance at the carriage, the door of which had swung open.

That glance, however, had shown that it was occupied by some one, but whether male or female, he had not been able to determine.

All around was still.

The vague idea that this was some deep-laid scheme of his for his entrapment, glanced through his mind, but it was instantly dismissed.

He could see by the expression of the face of she who knelt before him, that she was in earnest, and that her position in life was such as to place her above joining in any scheme against him.

Besides, he could not believe that one so fair and candid-looking as she was, could be guilty of treachery towards him or any one else.

Something very urgent could alone have instigated her to do as she had done.

But what was it?

Dick was curious in the extreme.

It was useless to speculate.

The only means by which he could satisfy his curiosity would be by at once avowing who he was, and noting the effect the pronunciation of his name had upon her.

These thoughts passed with great rapidity through his mind, but during the time they occupied the young lady had renewed her entreaty.

The person in the coach had uttered some words, but what their import was, Dick neither knew nor cared.

His whole attention was absorbed by the singular behaviour of the beautiful being before him.

"My name," he said, "though I am quite at a loss to know why you wish to hear it, is John Palmer."

"John Palmer!" repeated the lady, in accents of the deepest disappointment. "Then all this time has been lost in vain—when time is so precious. But I made sure that you were the person I took you to be."

She accepted of Dick's aid to rise as she spoke.

"Surely, miss," said Dick, "after complying with your request, and telling you my name, you cannot, I should think, refuse to tell me for whom you took me."

"I took you for another."

"So I can readily judge; but what other? You have raised my curiosity excessively, and surely you will not refuse to gratify it?"

"I will tell you, sir, but pray let me return to my carriage, and resume my journey. Your surprise will doubtless be great—perhaps, even, you may be offended—but I took you for a celebrated character."

"Who, miss?"

"A highwayman."

"I do not scruple to avow that such is my profession."

"But the person I fancied you were is one who is justly entitled to be called the prince of highwaymen."

"And who may that be, with so enviable a title?"

"Richard Turpin."

Dick started, but he took off his hat, and made an elaborate bow, as he said:

"I am your humble servant."

"Ah! I was right, then. You deceived me before. Your name is not Palmer—"

"My name is Palmer, lady. I did not deceive you. I am known, however, not by that name, but the one by which you addressed me."

"All is well, then?"

"May I ask what is well?"

"You may. My behaviour seems incomprehensible and lunatic, no doubt, but it will all be explained."

Turpin bowed.

"I have heard that you have ever proved yourself a friend to the unfortunate. That you, although transgressing the laws, have atoned for many of those acts by deeds of mercy and goodness towards those who have been friendless and unprotected. Have I heard rightly?"

"It does not become any one to speak of himself," replied Turpin, "but I have certainly, as every man would, when I have seen the defenceless oppressed, interposed between them and the oppressor."

"I am right, then. I knew I was right. It was a

fortunate chance that I should have met you. I was in hopes of doing so; something seemed to tell me that I should see you."

"But your journey?"

"There is no need of it."

"You have not explained yet."

"No, I have not; but I have a favour to ask of you, a great favour."

"Speak freely, and without fear."

"I am in distress, and require a strong hand to succour me—at least, not myself, but another."

"I am at your service," said Turpin. "In what way can I assist you?"

"Time is precious. I cannot tell you now. I had intended to go to London to find a friend there—a person with whom I am acquainted, but from whom I did not expect to gain what I wished. I was in hopes of finding you, and, having done so, I must beg of you to accompany me. Will you do so? At the first opportunity everything shall be explained."

Dick hesitated.

For the second time the thought had risen up in his mind that this was some deep-laid scheme for his apprehension; that the lady was only playing a part, and that he was about to follow her to his own destruction.

But, for the second time, one glance into her face was sufficient to dispel these half-formed suspicions.

He could not bring himself to believe that she could be guilty of such baseness.

She, with a woman's quickness, noticed his hesitation, and said:

"Do not fear to trust yourself with me. No harm shall come to you. Take my word for it."

"I will believe you."

"You may do so in safety. Assist me into the carriage where my attendant is waiting for me, and you can either enter or—"

"I will mount and ride by the side of the carriage," said Turpin. "But to what place are you going to take me?"

"Not far from here. You will accompany me, will you not?"

"I will, but yet, believe me, I should like to know the nature of the service which you require me to perform, and how far are you going to take me?"

"It will require too much time, and there is none to lose. All shall be made clear to you, and the distance is only trifling. I had done little more than commence my journey to London."

As she spoke, Turpin assisted her to enter the carriage, and closed the door.

Then, at her request, he bade the driver turn the horses round, and go back the way he had come.

A faint chirping whistle brought Black Bess to his side in a moment.

He vaulted into the saddle and had fixed himself in the seat before the coachman had obeyed the order which had been given him.

CHAPTER CCXLIX.

IN WHICH THE READER, AS WELL AS DICK TURPIN, BEGINS TO SEE THE LIGHT.

MUCH wondering what all this meant, and how the most singular adventure he had ever met with would terminate, Turpin trotted gently at the side of the carriage, accommodating the speed of his own mare to that of the horses who drew it.

That his curiosity was raised to the utmost pitch, the reader can doubtless readily believe, and he was anxious in the extreme to have his bewildering speculations set at rest.

There was something so mysterious about the manner of the young lady, and withal something so romantic, that he felt himself irresistibly attracted towards her.

In the positions they then occupied, conversation was difficult, and almost impossible, as the combined sound of the rumbling of wheels and clattering hoofs drowned all words not uttered in a very loud tone.

From time to time, however, the highwayman cast a glance into the interior of the vehicle at the lady who had made the strange supplicatory request to him.

He noticed opposite to her was a woman of about thirty

years of age, and who was the attendant who had been alluded to.

In this way upwards of half-an-hour elapsed, ~~among~~ which about four miles had been travelled.

At the end of that time they came in sight of a large white stone building—a kind of residence common enough in the present day, but not so then.

On the right-hand side of the road were some large iron gates, and, adjoining them, a kind of keeper's lodge.

At the request of the young lady, Dick rode forward a little, and pulled the handle of a bell.

The summons was replied to by a man, who, as soon as he saw the carriage through the bars, threw the gate open without delay.

They then entered, taking their way along a broad, smooth, gravelled path, which wound about in a serpentine fashion.

They did not, however, continue to keep to this path, but took one that branched off to the left, leading, Dick afterwards found, to the back part of the mansion.

The night was now, of course, very far advanced, and as he looked up to the house, both at the back and front, Dick could perceive no signs of any one inhabiting it.

From one window alone, and that was high up in the building, streamed forth a faint light.

The carriage stopped before a small door, which looked like a private entrance to the mansion.

Finding that they were to go no further, Dick Turpin dismounted, and, opening the door, assisted the lady and her attendant to alight.

The former spoke.
"Will you enter?" she said, "and then I will give you the explanation which I am sure you must be anxious to receive."

"Willingly," said Dick, "but"—

"But what?"

"My mare."

"She will be quite safe. Leave her, and James will take her, and see that she is put in the stable and made comfortable."

"Exactly. Still"—

"You hesitate. Speak freely, I beg."

"I cannot feel safe or comfortable unless I know that my mare is in perfect safety. I mean without I see her stabled with my own eyes."

"Ah! yes," said the lady, "I have heard as much, and also that you love Black Bess as you would love a mistress."

"You have heard correctly," said Turpin. "I do love her. I am grateful to her because she has saved my life upon more than one occasion."

"I should much like to hear the story of your life, but this is neither the place nor time for you to tell, or for me to hear it. James will show you to the stables, and then bring you back to me."

Turpin bowed.

James was the name of the man who had driven the carriage.

He had descended from his seat, and when the young lady had finished speaking, he said—

"Will you take the bridle of your mare and follow me?"

The highwayman replied by at once leading his mare forward.

He had not, however, to go many yards.

The stables were close at hand.

James left the horses in the carriage, and opened the door to allow Dick to enter.

The stable was large and well fitted up.

It was divided into many stalls, in which were several horses, which a glance showed to be of first-rate quality.

Dick, us usual, saw his mare littered down and fed.

He also consoled the coachman by making him a present of a crown piece, and requested him to finish properly attending to her.

He then followed him from the stable, full of impatience to learn the sequel of this adventure.

As he went out, however, he carefully noted all the different objects around him, and impressed their different bearings upon his memory, so that he might, should occasion require it, be able to find his way alone and unguided.

The door leading into the mansion before which the carriage had stopped, was ajar.

James pushed it wide open, and led Dick along a passage which was dark as the grave.

But its termination was soon reached, and then Dick was ushered into an apartment to which we must devote a line or two of description.

It was spacious, and furnished with massive oak.

The walls, too, from floor to ceiling, were composed of panelled oak.

Opposite the door by which he entered was the fireplace, in which several logs of wood were blazing.

This was the only illumination in the apartment, but it was quite sufficient. The wood was dry, and of a resinous quality, so that it emitted a brilliant and ruddy light.

It revealed every object within the apartment, and, had there been a lamp, it would have been of no service, for its rays would have been quite lost.

Seated by the fire, in an oak chair of an antique fashion, was the mysterious lady.

She rose, however, as soon as Turpin made his appearance, and, with well-bred ease, requested him to seat himself in a chair that had been placed upon the opposite side of the fireplace to that where she was sitting.

She had taken off her travelling apparel, and now appeared attired in a much more bewitching manner.

Her dress was composed entirely of black serge, cut low in the neck, with short sleeves, the arms being left bare.

They were of dazzling fairness, and so, too, were her neck and shoulders—they seemed, perhaps, even more so by the contrast which her sombre habiliments presented.

Yet that fairness, great as it was, had nothing unhealthful in it. It was a pure, clear white, relieved upon the cheeks by a faint rosy tinge, which quite took off all appearance of ghastliness or disease.

Dick had thought, when he had seen her in the open air, and in the partial darkness, that he had never seen a face so purely beautiful.

Her beauty, indeed, was of that kind which the old Grecian sculptors so much delighted to delineate.

But the living original possessed something which the other lacked.

It is true the marble accurately represented the lovely contours of the cheeks and chin and curving lips, and displayed the perfect form of the square forehead, but the eyes were absent.

The eyes, the most beautiful feature in her face.

No marble could imitate them, or convey an idea of what they were like.

They were intensely black—jet black—large, full, and languishing.

Her eyebrows, too, were black, and strongly pencilled—indeed, some critics would have considered them a blemish to that otherwise faultless face.

Dick looked at her entranced, and the longer he gazed, the more apparent did her bewitching loveliness become.

For a few seconds after he had seated himself, the silence was unbroken.

Each were engaged in perusing the lineaments and noting the appearance of the other.

Dick would have spoken earlier than he did, only he knew not what to say, and whether he should be doing right by taking upon himself to speak first.

A certain amount of embarrassment could have been detected by a close observer in the lady herself.

It was evident she wished to utter something, but knew not how to begin.

The fire blazed and cracked, while a large, old-fashioned clock, which stood in a recess by the side of the grate, sent forth a monotonous tick—tack, which made itself plainly heard in the silence.

The singularity of his position had a strange effect upon Dick.

He began to ask himself whether what was taking place around him was real, or whether it was simply a creation of his disordered fancy.

It seemed unreal.

There was something altogether out of the usual course of things from first to last in the whole affair.

He was about to break the silence, which had begun to oppress him terribly, when fortunately the lady, making a strong effort, spoke.

"Sir," she said, "you have been kind enough to accede to my request so far, and I sincerely thank you. A young lady, fair, rich, and beautiful, has, by a series of cruel in-

cidents, been placed in a position of the utmost distress. She is alone, and with but one friend in the whole world, and that friend, with all the will, has not the power to aid her. She requires a strong hand, a willing heart, and a powerful mind to free her from the meshes which threaten to involve her in destruction. These words, I doubt not, will furnish you with the clue you desired to have, but, before I enter into particulars, you must take a glass of wine. You must be cold and exhausted after your ride. It was remiss of me. I ought to have mentioned it before."

"Pray do not apologize or put yourself to any trouble upon my account."

"But you will take some wine," and as she uttered the words, the lady rose to her feet and walked to the opposite side of the apartment, where stood an old oak buffet.

Opening one of the doors, she produced a couple of bottles and a glass, which she placed upon a salver and set down on the corner of the table where Dick was sitting, and within reach of his hand.

She, however, poured out a glass of wine, and pressed her strange guest to partake of it.

Of course, Dick complied.

It would have been churlish to refuse, and besides, he felt that a glass of generous liquor would be acceptable—for his hurts made him more susceptible of fatigue than usual.

The lady reseated herself, and Turpin turned round and leaned back in the chair with more ease and freedom than he had before done.

When she had spoken of the distressed lady, and said that she had but one friend, and that one not able to assist her in the manner in which she needed assistance, Dick was at no loss to come to the conclusion that the friend alluded to was no other than herself.

That he had determined to render all the aid that lay in his power, the reader can easily believe—since such a resolution accords so well with his character.

He waited, therefore, to be placed in possession of such facts as would enable him to act.

CHAPTER CCL.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A CONNEXION BETWEEN THE LADY'S STRANGE STORY AND THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"I HAVE so much to tell you," began the young lady, "and so many facts rise up in a moment in my mind, that I hardly know where to begin, or how to tell you what I wish to communicate."

"I hope you will believe, lady, that I am most desirous of rendering your friend all the assistance in my power."

"Many thanks. For my own part, I never doubted your willingness."

"Indeed!"

"I judged you by what I had heard recounted of you, and I find that I was right."

"Do not compliment me. I am the worst in the world to bear anything of the kind. I always feel uncomfortable."

"But they are merited."

"No matter, the effect is just the same; but, lady, you spoke just now of not knowing where to commence your history. Will you pardon me for making a suggestion?"

"What is it?"

"I think, for me to be thoroughly useful—to know how to act—I ought to know all. I think, then, that you had better begin at the beginning, and tell me all the particulars which you can recollect."

"Well, perhaps it will be best," said the lady, musingly; "and yet"—

"Yet what?"

"No matter, I will do as you desire, and then you will be better able to come to a conclusion."

"At last," thought Dick to himself, "I shall know the meaning of this most incomprehensible affair."

The lady was silent for a moment or so, during which a period of time she seemed to be running over in her mind what she was going to say.

At length, in a clear voice, and with a distinct articulation, she began as follows—

"This house—or hall, as it is called—in which we are now sitting, is the property and residence of William

Winberry, whose father was one of the richest merchants the whole city of London could boast.

"When a comparatively young man, he gave up business and retired here.

"He was then a widower, and it was the recent death of his wife, of whom he was very fond, that had the greatest share in inducing him to withdraw from the world.

"He had one child, a son—the same, indeed, who now owns the hall—the William Winberry of whom I spoke.

"He remained in a state of absolute retirement from the world for a space of three years, and he married again.

"What were the precise reasons which led him to take this step I know not, nor does it matter in the least to what I have to say."

Dick bowed assentingly, though he mentally took a note of the circumstance, for he thought it not unlikely, trivial as it seemed, that the event would turn out to be of importance in the end.

The lady continued.

"I perhaps ought to tell you that this second wife was above him in station, but not in wealth. She was, indeed, an earl's daughter, and the riches of the merchant widower doubtless swayed her choice.

"However, be that as it may, they were married.

"One child, a son, was the fruit of this union.

"It seems very strange for me to relate to you a private family history, but it is necessary that you should know all this. I can trust to your honour to divulge none of it."

"You can," said Turpin, "and it rejoices me to find that there is at least one person in the world who has not a bad opinion of me."

"There are many, I can assure you, who, while regretting that you have chosen the mode of life you have, yet cannot withhold their admiration of the many good deeds you have performed."

"Let us return to the subject under discussion," said Dick, who hated to hear anything in his own commendation.

"You have a noble heart, and that is why you wish your deeds of good to be unnoted. I have seen nothing of you until to-night, but you have at present fully borne out the opinion I have formed of you, and the more I speak to you, the more inclined do I feel to trust you, and the more persuaded am I that the step I have taken, though an extraordinary one, will be fully justified in the end."

"Proceed, lady," said Turpin.

"I will not delay you any longer than I can possibly help. Mr. Winberry, then, lived as unhappily with his second wife as he had done happily with his former one. They were quite unsuited to each other.

"His wife was haughty, proud, cruel, and vindictive to all save one, and that one was her son, who inherited much of her fierce patrician disposition.

"He was, as well, of a most unbearing temper, and passionate in the extreme, but his mother, so far from checking this vicious inclination, fostered it, and allowed his passions, whether for good or evil, to have full and unrestrained play. The latter predominated.

"The first-born son, William, was the very opposite. He resembled his mother, whom his father had so dearly loved, not only in his countenance, but also in his mental composition, though he united with it much that his father possessed.

"In proportion as the gulf of estrangement between the husband and his second wife widened, so did the bands of sympathy draw the father and his first-born together—they were inseparable.

"It would seem that the second wife noticed this, and took alarm at it, for her demeanour suddenly, and without any perceptible cause underwent a total change.

"Her son, too, whom she had named Adrian, curbed, to a great extent, the violence of his nature.

"His mother grew suddenly attentive to, and fond of her husband, but whether his own feelings changed is more than I am able to tell you.

"I ought not to omit to tell you that Adrian, the second son, was fearfully jealous of his elder brother, and hated him with the bitterest rancour.

"Things were in this state, when the second wife died of a contagious disorder, which was then decimating the whole neighbourhood.



[DICK TURPIN FINDS ELLEN AND TOM DAVIS DESTITUTE AND IN DISTRESS.]

"To this scourge her husband himself fell a victim very soon after—so soon, indeed, that both were buried in the grave.

"A will was left.

"Mr. Winberry had had it drawn up with scrupulous care by a London attorney, and no one in the house was acquainted with the nature of its contents.

"There was in the chamber in which Mr. Winberry slept a cabinet of curious and antique manufacture, in which papers of value were deposited, such as mortgages, securities, and such like documents, for though he had retired from business, Mr. Winberry frequently lent money out on interest.

"The day came upon which the will was to be read.

"The keys were handed to the lawyer, who at once advanced to the cabinet I have spoken of, and in which he stated the will of the deceased had been deposited with his own hands.

"But upon looking, to the consternation of all present, no will was to be found,

"The circumstance of its having been stolen—for that was the conclusion unanimously come to—was puzzling. What motive could there have been for the deed? Surely the younger brother could have had no hand in its removal, for, of course, in the event of the father dying intestate, the whole of the property, landed or personal, would descend to the eldest son.

"Who could have been interested in purloining it?

"The only person was the eldest son, William, to whose advantage it would be to destroy the will, if the property had been bequeathed to the younger born.

"But those who knew the deceased felt certain this was not the case. In the first place, William was known to be too highminded and honourable a young man, and too fond of his father to attempt such a deed, and, in the second, the deceased had not sufficient love for Adrian to deprive William of his rights.

"It was a very remarkable and perplexing occurrence was it not?"

"Very, indeed," replied Turpin, whose interest yet

increasing every moment the beautifu. being before him spoke

"However, it turned out to be of no importance. Indeed, the lawyer offered an opinion relative to its disappearance different to any that had been yet expressed.

"He stated that the deceased had caused to be prepared a will, which he had seen witnessed, and which he then held in his possession.

"An exact copy of this will had been given to the deceased, who had had it deposited in the cabinet where he had gone to look for it."

"That was the copy, then?"

"Precisely. The lawyer then took from his portfolio of papers the original document, which he proceeded to read to those present.

"By this will, the bulk of the property was left to William, the eldest son. To Adrian was bequeathed an annual income of eight hundred pounds, sufficient to keep him in affluence, but no more.

"There were other minor bequeathments, but those do not matter in the least.

"After reading the will, the brothers met and quarrelled. What passed between them no one knows; their interview had no auditor.

"However, Adrian left, and went no one knew whither.

"After a time, William married. I speak now of the present owner of the hall—the eldest son.

"In due course a child was born, but, in giving it birth, the mother, who was of a very delicate constitution, lost her own life.

"This child was a girl.

"Her father never married again, consequently the girl, who is now about my own age, is the sole heir to the wealth and the estates."

"I presume, then," said Dick, "that this is the friend of whom you spoke?"

"It is."

"And what is her name?"

The question seemed a strange one for Dick to ask, and one that was of little importance.

But it was not so.

He had a motive for asking the question, as will presently be apparent.

He even anticipated the reply which would be given him, and he evinced no astonishment when the lady replied—

"Blanche!"

CHAPTER CCLI.

DICK TURPIN IS ABLE TO IMPART SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.

FROM a very early stage in the story the lady was relating—from, indeed, the time when the two brothers had been mentioned—Dick had felt the conviction creep over him that there was some kind of connexion, near or remote, between what he then heard and what he had witnessed during his brief sojourn in the reputed haunted house in Birdcage-walk.

The circumstance of the double marriage—the unhappy wife—the two brothers—and, last of all, the name of the girl proving to be Blanche, all tended to fix that conviction in his mind.

But it was a most wonderful coincidence.

As yet, however, he stood but on the threshold of the knowledge that he was about to be put in possession of—all that he had heard was but the prologue to the drama—the heart of the mystery had yet to be laid bare.

Nothing that he had listened to had enabled him to come to a right understanding of the mysterious events which had so puzzled him.

The lady saw nothing particular in Dick's asking the name of the daughter. She evidently looked upon it as a mere commonplace casual question, for she expressed no surprise respecting it.

She continued.

"After the departure of Adrian, nothing was heard of him for a long—long time. William lived here the peaceable and contented life of a country gentleman, and spending all the time he possibly could with his daughter Blanche, upon whom he doted with a double love—that which he had borne for her mother and that which was his own.

"Had you searched the whole kingdom through, you would not have found a happier and more peaceful home than this.

"Its felicity was doomed to be interrupted.

"Three months ago—or it may be longer—the young brother Adrian made his appearance at the hall.

"He had an interview with William in the library, which was his favourite apartment when indoors, and he came forth with compressed lips and flashing eyes.

"Quite by an accident, I sometime afterwards learned the substance of what had passed between them.

"Large as was the annual income settled upon him by his father, Adrian had squandered it, and was chin-deep in difficulties. Indeed, his annual revenue for several years to come had been forestalled, and he had nothing whereon to live.

"Under these circumstances he had applied to William—not like one who requires assistance and would be grateful for it, but with the endeavour to extort money from him—to wrest away that which belonged by law to him and to no other.

"William, although rich, was a careful man. I do not mean that he was niggardly, but he was not improvident; indeed, he not only hated that, but all who were guilty of reckless extravagance.

"He dismissed his brother, therefore, who departed, and the slight cloud which he cast upon the happiness of those at the hall passed away, and things resumed their usual course.

"But the effects of his visit were soon apparent.

"Like some dark cloud on the horizon of a pure blue sky, prognosticating that ere long the bright heavens were to be clouded as with a pall and a storm break forth, so did his appearance foretell disaster and misery to this happy home.

"About a month after his visit, and when that ill-omened event had almost been forgotten, Blanche disappeared."

Dick nodded his head.

It was just what he expected.

"In vain was the closest search everywhere made for her. Her father was like one frantic. All their efforts, however, proved abortive—not the slightest trace of her was to be found.

"It was then that I heard of the interview, and what had taken place between the half-brothers.

"In a moment I connected Adrian with the abduction, though what was his motive for it I was not able to hazard a guess.

"William Winberry, her father, instituted a most vigorous search in every direction, placing himself always at the head.

"One morning, and that is about six weeks ago, he went out at the head of one of the excursions. He was mounted on horseback, and somehow or other he got separated from his companions.

"He never returned.

"You may guess this double blow plunged the whole household into the deepest grief, for William and his daughter were universally beloved for their good qualities of head and heart.

"Rewards were offered and men sent out, and every day some intelligence was hoped for and expected, but, alas! those hopes and anticipations were doomed never to be realized. Each night only brought us the tidings of a day of disappointment.

"And so things have gone on up to the present moment. I think I have told you that Blanche is my cousin. Such is scarcely the case, but we are distantly related to each other, and we fixed upon that as being both convenient and friendly.

"Between Blanche and myself there has always existed a very warm attachment, and you may think how much all these terrible occurrences have disturbed me. There is no one in the mansion save myself who is able to undertake the conduction of affairs.

"Nor have I any person to consult with, for, with the exception of the two persons I have named, I have not a relative in the world.

"I have done all in my power, and failed.

"What to attempt next I know not.

"Suddenly, I remembered having heard of you, and how, though you and the law were at war, you had done us a good action.

"I also heard how successful you were in what you undertook, and how the very boldness with which you usually set about things generally brought success with it."

"As soon as the idea seized me, I had the horses put in the carriage, and confided my scheme to the person who was with me, and who is the personal attendant of Blanche, and also to the steward, who, for once in his life, played the part of coachman."

"Upon both these you can rely."

"I thought of your perilous position."

"I ought to tell you now that I set out with a double intent."

"I went towards London in the hope of meeting with you, but had I not have done so, I should have applied to some of the officials of the state."

"I chose night for making the journey because that was the time when I knew I had the best chance of meeting with you."

"Fortunately I have met you, and now I think I have given you the clue to all."

"You have, lady," said Turpin.

"And do you quite understand?"

"I think so, and, more than that, that something more than chance conspired to bring about our meeting."

"What mean you?"

"In the first place, it was a remarkable thing that I should be upon the road to-night. Had I listened to the urgings of a friend, I certainly should not have been."

"Indeed! then I have cause to be doubly thankful."

"You count, then, upon my co-operation?"

"Pardon me if I say I do."

"And you are quite right, lady. I would run any risk—lay down my life, even—should it be necessary to render a service to yourself, or any one who was dear to you."

There was a solemn impressiveness in the manner this speech was uttered, which allowed no doubt of his sincerity.

"I believe you," said the lady, "and thank you at the same time. I had no one I could consult with, or probably they would have dissuaded me from the project I had formed, as savouring too much of the romantic. But it so happened that for once I was permitted to have my own way, and the result is your presence here."

"I can detect the finger of that mysterious thing called fate in all this," said Turpin, earnestly. "The coincidences are so extraordinary."

"You spoke of coincidences before, but you did not explain yourself; pray do so now."

"I will. I have some tidings to communicate to you."

"Let me hear them—pray let me hear them. Do not keep me any longer in suspense."

"You must prepare yourself for a shock."

"A shock?"

"Yes, and a severe one."

"Blanche?"

"Be calm. I have little, if anything, to tell you about her."

"It is William, then."

"Be calm, I beseech you. Promise me to be calm, and to hear with patience and fortitude that which I have to tell you."

"I will—I am."

"Excuse me, but the tones of your voice, and the manner in which you speak, belie your words."

"But I am calmer now, and if you do not wish my agitation to increase, keep me no longer in suspense, but let me know the worst at once."

"I will."

"Pray begin."

"Last night—or, I suppose more correctly, the night before last, for the present one is almost spent—I was pursued by my foes through St. Xavier's park."

"Anxious to find some hiding-place, I remembered that there was in Birdcage-walk a house which enjoyed the reputation of being haunted."

"With a good deal of difficulty, I made my way into it, but scarcely had I reached the hall than I heard a faint rattling sound, which in the silence that was everywhere around, was very audible."

"Not knowing for a moment what it was, and anxious to ascertain, I ascended the stairs a little way, and crouching down, watched and waited."

"I soon found that the rattling sound was produced by a key being thrust into the lock of the front door."

"Much wondering who it could be at that ghostlike hour who was endeavouring to obtain an entrance into a house of so ominous a reputation, I looked more eagerly than before."

"The bolt of the lock, which seemed rusted with disuse, was obstinate, and the wards refused to act, but at length the door opened, and three men entered."

"Two were ordinary-looking personages, such as one might find in the streets of London at any moment."

"But the third person was very different."

"He was tall and stoutly built, but his figure was concealed by a long ample cloak, which added greatly to his height, and his features were concealed by a large broad-brimmed hat, which was pulled on as low over the brows as possible."

"Only the lower part of the face was left visible, and that was covered with shining black hair, so that, in point of fact, his features were invisible."

"This person called for a light as soon as he had closed and locked the door behind him, and one of the two men, who were evidently his servants or attendants, unmasked a dark lantern, and the whole party made their way across the hall to the foot of the staircase, which they began to ascend."

CHAPTER COLI.

DICK TURPIN RELATES WHAT HE SAW AND HEARD IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the younger lady, with a plainly perceptible shudder. "How terrible! You fairly frighten me! What must have been your feelings to have seen three men in such a dreadful place at night? I should have swooned at once. Were you not frightened?"

"Well, hardly!" said Turpin, with a smile. "I am used to such adventures as those, and they have long since ceased to make any impression upon me."

"Is it possible? But pray continue. You have worked my interest up to the highest pitch."

"Can such a story have such an effect upon you?"

"How? What do you mean?"

"Simply that, so far as the incidents yet related have occurred, I think it the simplest thing in the world."

"Then you have had other adventures more terrible?"

"Oh! by far."

"I would give much to have them recounted to me."

"Would you, lady?"

"I would, indeed. It is a part of my nature to delight in all stories of the wild and wonderful, and especially is my interest excited when I know the marvellous occurrences to which I listen are truths."

"I see—I see. But pardon me, lady; let us confine ourselves to the matter we have in hand. It is, I can assure you, and as you will find in the sequel, a very serious one."

"Go on, I pray you."

"Some time, perhaps, an idle hour may be found in which I can relate to you some of the adventures you wish to hear—but let us leave that now."

"With all my heart."

"Seeing, then, that it was the intention of the three men who had entered the haunted house, to ascend the stairs, I slowly and stealthily went up before them."

"There was a thick coating of dirt and dust upon the stairs which made my footsteps inaudible, or nearly so. At all events, what little sound I made was effectually drowned by the noise made by those following me, who did not attempt to keep silence, and the manner altogether in which they had acted, convinced me that this was by no means their first visit to the haunted house."

"I think I should have told you that the house in question has been deserted for many years."

"I know the place well."

"Indeed?"

"When in London, I have had it pointed out to me, and have never looked up at its gloomy walls and dirt-begrimed windows without a sensation of dread and undefined apprehension creeping over me."

"Such a feeling is only natural to sensitive organizations. But to resume. I preceded them up the stairs

in the manner I have described, until I reached the commencement of the third flight of stairs.

"The three men paused upon the landing below me. That is to say, upon the second floor of the house.

"Of course, I did not go any higher, but stopped at once—for I felt extremely curious to know what was their business there at such an hour, and surrounded with so much mystery as they evidently were.

"By the aid of the lantern, which one of the men carried, I could see that several doors led from this landing, either into apartments or corridors.

"Before one of these doors they paused, and the one in the cloak, after feeling in his pocket, produced a key.

"With this he unlocked the door and passed through it, followed by his two companions.

"They did not close the door after them, but left it ajar.

"And then arose a succession of shrieks, so shrill and ear-piercing, that I felt confident they came from a woman's lips, had not a few words dropped by the men let me know it was a man."

"A man!" ejaculated the lady, as a sudden suspicion glanced into her mind; "a man?"

Up to this point in Dick's wondrously interesting narration, she had not spoken a word. All her faculties were absorbed in that of listening. She had sat with wide-open eyes and parted lips devouring his words.

It was with an effort that she asked the question.

"Yes, a man," replied Dick, "but pray do not interrupt me. I would rather you listened patiently to all I said. When I had finished, you would then be better able to draw your own conclusions."

"I should—I should."

"As I told you, then, they left the door ajar, never dreaming for a moment that there was any other living being in the house beside themselves.

"I waited a moment, in order to make sure they had fairly entered; and, as I heard the sound of voices, I descended the stairs and approached the partially-opened door.

"At first I saw nothing, and the import of the words which now came distinctly enough to my ears, was, that there was an old man confined in the apartment—that the three persons I had seen enter were his enemies. Moreover, I learned their purpose. One, who by his deep voice I recognised as the stranger in the cloak, was endeavoring both by threats and persuasions, to induce him to sign a deed which would transfer the chief part of his property to him."

"Good heavens!"

"Calm yourself—pray calm yourself."

"I am. But pray go on."

"The chief argument used to persuade the prisoner to accede to the terms he wished was that his daughter, who was also held a prisoner, should be restored to him."

The lady clasped her hands together with awe as she heard these words, and then she cried—

"His daughter! Tell me her name. Did you hear it mentioned? If you did, tell it to me. Pray tell it to me at once."

"I must again ask you to calm yourself," said Turpin, drawing his chair closer towards her. "I must again ask you to be calm; and, as I before said, prepare yourself for the worst."

"The worst?"

"Even so. Doubtless you now comprehend the motive of my apparently objectless question of the name of Mr. Winberry's daughter?"

"I fear I do."

"The name was the same."

"Blanche?"

"Yes."

"My heart told me so! my heart told me so! But continue, pray continue."

"Willingly. I would rather you had listened calmly to the end."

"I will do so, I assure you I will do so, if you will only resume."

"I may as well tell you that when I had stood at the door a little while listening, I changed my position, so that I was able not only to hear, but also to see what was going forward.

"The first thing, then, that met my eyes was the figure of an old man. His face was wrinkled and careworn, and

he had about him the appearance of extreme age, yet I could tell that it was premature.

"This old man was much emaciated.

"He was held down in a chair by the two men.

"The dark lantern I have mentioned had been placed upon the table, and the door opened. It was from the light from this which enabled me to see that which I describe.

"I did not at first catch a glimpse of the one who wore a cloak. The door hid him, but presently he stepped forward and came into full view.

"I could, however, see but little more of him than I had seen before. The large cloak still enveloped him, and he still kept the hat drawn down closely over his brows.

"The lower part of his face was quite hidden by the dense mass of hair which grew about it.

"I could, though, see a little more than I had seen before, for I was able to trace a faint resemblance between him and the old man sitting in the chair."

"Mer——"

"One moment," said Dick, interrupting the lady as she was about to speak. "The one in the cloak placed upon the table a properly drawn-up deed, and wanting only a signature to complete it, in which was assigned the whole of the property the old man possessed.

"In return for signing this document, he was to receive his freedom and be restored to his daughter Blanche, as well as have a certain sum settled upon him for life.

"Some conversation then ensued between them, the one in the cloak striving to bring the other to his desires.

"The old man, however, used some words which still ring in my ears. I will repeat them even as I heard them. They were these—

"We are brothers, but, thank heaven, the same mother did not bear us. Mine died, and when our common father took another bride, he little dreamt that he was warming a serpent in his bosom, but so it was."

"He said those words?"

"He did; but listen, I beseech you. After a great deal of hesitation, the old man consented, for his daughter's sake, to sign the deed.

"Fain would I, had it been in my power, have interposed to save him to prevent this consummation. But how was I to do so? I feared some ill and treachery lurked beneath his words; but I ask again what could I do? In brief, the old man seized the pen which was temptingly offered him, and signed the deed."

"Never!"

"He did. But listen further. Scarcely had he finished the last stroke, than the man in the cloak drew, with the rapidity of lightning, a pistol from his breast, and placing it against the old man's head, fired."

The lady uttered a piercing shriek, but by a wonderful effort of strength she controlled herself, and requested Turpin to continue.

"The report from the pistol sounded with startling loudness through the silent mansion.

"But the deed was so unexpected upon my part, and so suddenly performed, that I was for the space of about ten seconds, positively deprived of motion.

"It is hard to say how long this would have continued, but I was doomed to receive another surprise.

"Some heavy blows were struck upon the front door.

"I have told you that I was pursued, that I had entered the haunted house in the hopes of escaping from my pursuers. I fancied I had been unperceived, but these sounds seemed to show that somehow or other they had got upon my track.

"I should have darted forward to the old man's assistance had not this occurred, but as it was, I saw that I could not aid him, and that my own safety depended upon instant flight.

"The manner in which the blows were struck upon the front door were sufficient to show me that it was intended to break it down."

CHAPTER CCLIII.

DICK TURPIN SETS OUT FOR LONDON TO GAIN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESPECTING THE MURDER.

"This is indeed a fearful tale!" said the young lady.

"It approaches a termination. Pray allow me to conclude it."

"Go on, sir! I can see the hand of Providence. The guilty will be yet confounded!"

"I trust so! The heavy blows upon the door discomposed the men quite as much or more than they did me. I could tell that by their hurried movements. I was, however, compelled to seek my own safety by instant flight, so I sprang up the stairs. Had I been found where I was, I should, in all probability, have been implicated in the murder, and I should have had great difficulty in clearing myself of the charge.

"Besides, my liberty was already forfeit, and had I been captured my death would have been the inevitable result.

"The interruption was a most inopportune one. Had it not been for those heavy blows, I should have sprang into the room to the old man's assistance, though I fear I could have rendered him but little aid. The pistol was placed in contact with his ear, and the discharge which followed could not have been otherwise than fatal.

"It has been my lot to witness many a cold-blooded murder, but I can say I never saw one so awful as that. I never for one moment dreamt that a human being could have acted with so much perfidy."

"Oh, it is horrible—most horrible!" exclaimed the young lady, who, prepared as she had been by Dick's words, had sat stupefied with terror from the time the revelation had been made. "It is most horrible!"

"Listen! I sprang up the stairs and gained the roof. What took place afterwards I cannot tell, nor whether the murderers were arrested. I was fortunate enough to make my way over the house-tops and to enter a window, and thence I descended into a street, having escaped the great peril with which I was so imminently threatened.

"From that time until the present moment I have heard nothing more of the extraordinary affair of which I was a witness. You will not, I fancy, be at any loss to connect it with what you have related to me!"

"I can do so easily enough! You overcome me. I am bewildered at the strange combination of incidents, producing such wonderful coincidences. It seems beyond belief!"

"It does indeed!"

"Let me think—let me try to think!"

As she spoke, the lady let her head fall upon her hands, or rather, she clasped her hands over her head in the manner of one who wishes to shut out from contemplation all external objects, and whose desire it was to concentrate the whole power of thought.

Turpin was silent.

The fire had burned down and its ruddy light had faded away. Only occasionally came a fitful flash which illuminated the apartment with a transient brightness, leaving it in deeper darkness than before.

The wood logs had burned down to a red heat.

The weirdlike nature of the scene pressed heavily upon Dick. It was in vain he tried to shake off the impression.

He, too, tried to think, and to shut out his strange fantastical surroundings, likewise placed his hands over his eyes.

But soon the desire to know what the lady would say next rose paramount above every other consideration.

He did not move from his position, but shifted his fingers slightly so that he could see between them.

She had thrown herself back in the large chair in which she sat. Her sable robe could scarcely be distinguished from the dark oak of which it was composed, but her white and beautifully rounded arms shone out in all the greater contrast.

It was evident she was perplexed and overcome by the intelligence which Dick had just imparted to her.

At length, however, she roused herself.

Looking Turpin steadfastly in the face, and even in the gloom fixing her bright eyes upon him, she said—

"Tell me, if you can, what I had better do in all this. Your intellect is more calm and logical, your judgment is assisted by experience, and therefore, I look to you for advice. It was a girlish and romantic feat to set out in the hope of meeting with you, as I did, and how many would have laughed at me for it. Yet how strangely things are brought about. Apparently by the most unlikely means Providence brings about her ends. You, in all probability, are the only person who could supply

me with the information for which I sought, and I meet with you and learn all!"

"I should think a parallel could scarcely be found."

"And so should I. And now do not be offended if I make an appeal to you—if I entreat a favour."

"Fear not; speak freely and without hesitation."

"I am a poor, weak, inexperienced girl, left to the management of matters which might puzzle a wiser head than mine! I have confided in you. I have been impelled to do so by the good opinion I had formed of you. I shall have to place even more confidence in you than I have done hitherto. Let me appeal to your honour not to abuse it."

"Lady," said Turpin, proudly, "as you say, you do not know me. Had you done so, you would not have needed to make the prayer which has just passed your lips. Let this content you. Had I may be in the opinion of many destitute of honour, but I can lay my hand upon my heart, and say that I never yet proved false to those who trusted me, or even abused the confidence of the defenceless. On the contrary, I have upon every occasion done all in my power, and run the greatest risks to defend them from their enemies."

"That is sufficient. After what you have just said, I shall feel no dread of placing the utmost confidence in you. I shall trust you utterly, and if you betray me, I am lost indeed."

"I shall say no more by way of protestation—prove me. Trust me freely, and do not fear for the result."

A smile of trusting innocence appeared upon the lady's lips.

"And now," continued Turpin, "let us consider that as settled, and proceed to a consideration of what had best be done."

"With all my heart. Pour out more wine, and I will stir the fire, or we shall be quite in darkness."

As she uttered the words, the young lady stirred the fire, and made it once more burst into a bright blaze.

Dick drank some more wine as he had been desired, for it was of such a quality as he had never before tasted.

"Now let me hear what you think had best be done. The sooner we decide and act upon our decision the better."

"True. In the first place, then, the newspapers cannot fail, I should think, to contain some details of the murder, which I feel certain was discovered."

"Well?"

"From them we shall, without doubt, be able to glean some additional information, which will, ten to one, point out a plan of action."

"So it would. I see that at once. How simple, and yet I never thought of that?"

"Nor did I until the moment before I spoke. I am glad you are of the same opinion. Have you a paper here?"

"No."

"That is awkward."

"Not very. Morning is now close at hand. Supposing I called up one of the domestics, and sent him off to London to glean all the news respecting the murder he could, and then to return with such papers as he might be able to obtain?"

"A good plan, but I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"This. Instead of sending one of the domestics, let me go. Pardon me for having the conceit to think that I could manage the business best."

"I do not doubt that, but think of the fearful risk of capture which you would incur. No, no. I shall not consent to that."

"Stay! stay! Take my word for it, it will be best. Then, as for risk and danger, that for both!"

Dick filled his fingers as he spoke, to show the small amount of estimation in which he held them.

"You terrify me!"

"There is no cause for alarm."

"Do not say that. Were you situated differently to what you are, I should have proposed your going as by far the best, but, with a price upon your head, I cannot think of permitting it."

"I will promise you, not only for my own, but for yours and Blanche's sake, that I will use all possible caution, that I will run into no unnecessary danger, but that I will pry into the matter to the utmost, and return to you

without fail to-morrow night, bringing you full particulars."

The young lady's eyes glittered.

She admired true bravery and courage in a man above all other qualities, and her heart beat with a strange sensation of pleasure when she heard Dick talk so calmly and confidently, as he did, about his perilous enterprise.

The immediate consequences of his manner was that it begat a similar feeling of confidence in herself, and she no longer looked upon the excursion with the same amount of terror as she had at first beheld it with.

Dick was impatient to be gone. He explained to her the importance of his setting out at once, and if possible, of reaching London before daybreak.

He assured her that she might expect him at midnight, and, having done so, bade her farewell.

A quarter-of-an-hour afterwards he had mounted Black Bess, and was galloping rapidly along the high road in the direction of London.

But, coming to a rather steep hill, he drew rein and proceeded at an easier pace.

CHAPTER CCLIV.

DICK TURPIN FINDS ELLEN AND TOM DAVIS DESTITUTE AND IN DISTRESS.

"CAN all this be real?" said Dick, musingly, as Bess walked up the hill. "Can it all be real? Mine is a strange life; full of strange mutations and vicissitudes, but I have never yet met with any thing that will parallel this. The more I think upon it, the more wonderful does it seem! It is not so much the events themselves, but the manner in which they are connected together. How rare a chance was it that I should have overheard and witnessed what I did, and how much rarer was the chance which throw me in the way of the dear friend of the murdered man and Blanche—Blanche! I have long heard her name as yet, I wonder whether I shall ever see her! I trust so, for the interest I feel is no common one! But who is this mysterious and lovely lady, who has treated me as I have never before been treated? I have not heard her name as yet, but I shall soon! It cannot but be a pretty—but pshaw! let me leave that and turn to a consideration of the whole affair. I have not so clear a comprehension of it as I should like to have, but I shall soon resolve it, I make no doubt.

"In the first place there are two brothers, or rather half brothers, having the same father, but different mothers.

"The first of these, and by all accounts the better of the two, and the possessor of the estate and the principal portion of the wealth, marries, and has a daughter named Blanche. So much for him.

"Then there is the younger brother—the black sheep, and doubtless the cloaked stranger I saw in the haunted house, who wishes to obtain by force, or fraud, or both, that which is rightfully his brother's.

"He learns how the daughter, Blanche, is doated on, and that furnishes him with the key for action.

"She is mysteriously abducted.

"Then her distracted and almost maddened father is seized upon and confined in a solitary place, where the terms were made which I heard offered to him.

"It is truly a most delectable plot. For I feel sure I have arrived at the facts of the case. But how am I to frustrate it? I must defer that. Blanche—Blanche! What a pretty name! I must find out where her rascally relative has concealed her. Her father, alas, she will never see more, for that was her father I saw murdered in so cold-blooded a manner, I feel certain.

"For her sake I should like to bring him back to life, for if he loved her so devotedly as appears by all which I have heard, it is but reasonable to suppose that she loves her father in the same fashion. What, then, will be her grief when she learns he has fallen a victim to so terrible a fate! It will be great indeed.

"Adrian. That is the half-brother. I wonder whether I should recognize him again from what little I saw of his face? How did he get on, too, at the hands of the officers? That I know not. Perhaps both he and his two associates have been captured?"

The reader must not forget that Dick was quite in ignorance of what had happened after he crawled out on

to the roof. He knew nothing of the manner in which the three villains endeavoured to elude the police, nor how the two subordinates were captured in the garden. He knew nothing of the flight of Adrian through the park, nor how he had thrown his bushy beard and moustache away, and lost his hat and cloak. With all this the reader had been made acquainted, being necessary to the due comprehension of the story; and not only that, how Adrian was mistaken for Turpin, and carried into the lodge at Newgate, where we last left him.

Had Dick been aware of all this, it would have saved him a vast deal of trouble, and made a material difference in his plans; but there was no ready means by which he could arrive at the information.

We must be content to follow him upon his hazardous journey to London, and trace, step by step, the various incidents which befell him.

As for the wound his mare had received, it was nothing more than skin deep, and would have got well if it had been left to itself, but under the judicious treatment which it had received it had got almost well.

From its position, too, it luckily did not interfere in any way with her motion.

On gaining the brow of the hill, therefore, she set off at a rapid rate, though Dick checked her speed to some extent, for he did not wish her to exert herself too much.

Soon in the distance he could perceive, like a huge black cloud, the city of London.

It was profoundly dark, being the hour before the dawn.

There was not much likelihood of his meeting with any one on his journey. Few people would be abroad. The late ones had retired, and the early ones had not yet risen.

By the time he reached the outskirts, however, a faint leaden tinge appeared in the eastern horizon, which each moment grew imperceptibly brighter.

The new day was coming.

Still full of meditation, the highwayman trotted on, and he did not allow his thoughts to pre-occupy him entirely, for ever and anon he cast rapid glances around, in order to make certain that no prying or unfriendly eyes were fixed upon him.

Brighter and brighter grew the long white streaks of light which shone in the east. Higher and higher it mounted in the sky, shedding upon all things a dim and cold gray light, and making the old fashioned houses, with their quaint roofs and overhanging stories, look spectral and ghostlike.

"Where will be my safest place, I wonder?" thought Dick. "The officers have now got a good scent of me, and the large reward which is offered for my apprehension, will preclude all hopes that they will relax their efforts. Where shall it be? I must put up somewhere. The proverb says, the nearer the church the further from heaven, and I believe it. Why, then, should not I be safest in the place of the greatest danger? They have turned me away from the White Horse, suppose I return there straight. I'll do it, let the risk be what it may. I shall feel safer there, and more at ease than I should anywhere else."

Having arrived by this train of reason at a decision, he at once turned in the requisite direction.

He slightly increased his speed, too, for he did not care to go to his place of refuge by daylight.

To get there as soon as possible he took several short cuts through narrow streets, where the poorest portion of the inhabitants of the city dwelt.

Suddenly he heard a faint, low cry.

It came from somewhere very close at hand, but ere he could think where, a thin wasted-looking figure bounded towards him, and clapping her hands together, pronounced his name.

He started with wonder, and under the impulse of the moment, reined in his steed.

The young girl who had spoken came still nearer.

At the first glance Turpin fancied he had seen her somewhere before, but where, he could not recollect.

Certainly, the circumstances under which the meeting took place, were widely different to the present.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed the girl. "I have found you."

"Found me!"

"Can it be possible that you have forgotten me?"

"The tone in which these words were spoken was touching, and heart-breaking in the extreme.

"Your voice and form seem familiar to me, but yet I am at a loss to recollect—"

"Alas! that it should be so. I had fancied—but no matter. I knew you in a moment."

"And I know you. Give me some clue to our former meeting."

"Do you remember the poor ill-used orphan apprentice whom you rescued and placed in a comfortable home?"

"Ellen?"

"That is my name."

"Impossible! This cannot be you in this condition; or if it is, by what chance do I find you destitute and in distress?"

"Alas—alas!"

"Speak. Tell me."

"It will take long. But are you still prepared to stand my friend?"

"Can you doubt it, my dear girl? I have often thought of you, and the recollection of the one good action I performed has soled me in many a bitter hour."

Ellen sobbed, and tears ran down her cheeks. "I am not alone in misfortune," she said. "Your old friend, Mr. Davis—my father, as I call him—is in the same abject condition."

"Tom Davis! Has evil come upon him?"

"Turn round. Look behind you. Do you see yonder doorstep?"

"I do."

"Do you see two figures, bowed down and helpless, with want and suffering, seated upon it?"

"I do! I do! But—"

"That, then, is the condition of your old friend and his worthy wife. Ought I to say that they owe all their troubles to you?"

Dick did not hear the latter part of this speech, or if he did, he affected not to do so.

He had sprang off his mare upon the first intimation that it was his old friend in such distress, and hastened towards him.

On one side of the street there was a strange looking archway, which had the appearance of leading into a large piece of ground, which was surrounded with a high stone wall.

Fitted in this archway was a ponderous door, thickly studded with large headed iron nails.

Two steps led up to this door, and seated upon them were two wretched beings.

They seemed to be absolutely perishing, either of hunger or starvation, perhaps from the two combined.

They were male and female, and both in a state of apathetic unconsciousness.

Faint as was the cold gray light which fell upon their faces, Dick Turpin was immediately able to recognise them as Mr. and Mrs. Davis, who had for so long kept the Hand and Keys at Hornsey Wood.

CHAPTER CCLV.

ELLEN MINDS SHE HAS NOT BEEN MISTAKEN IN HER EXPECTATIONS, AND DICK TURPIN, AFTER A LITTLE DELAY, REACHES WHITE HORSE YARD.

DICK TURPIN was inexpressibly shocked when he beheld the condition to which his old and faithful friends had been reduced.

It was evident that they had been acquainted with gaunt poverty for some time.

The emaciation of their forms—the tattered state of their apparel, all showed that they had been, for months at least, exposed to the utmost degree of want and privation.

When Turpin last saw Davis few men could have been found to rival him in portliness of form, but now he was little more than a framework of bones, upon which the skin hung in large folds.

His hair had turned much whiter, and indeed, take him for all in all, he presented as true a picture of mendicancy as could well have been found.

Black Bess, as soon as her rider had alighted, followed him as a dog would, and when he stopped she stopped also a few paces behind him.

Ellen, too, approached.

"Tom," said Turpin, in a husky voice, "can it be

possible that you are in such a state as this? Nay, do not hang your head, but look up and speak to me. I am your old friend Dick. Do you recollect me?"

Tom Davis had allowed his head to sink down upon his breast, and he made no effort to move it from that position.

He seemed as though he had totally succumbed beneath the weight of his misfortune, and nothing could rouse him.

When he uttered the words we have recorded, Dick accompanied them by placing his hand upon his old friend's shoulder. He shook him gently, too, and at length Tom looked up, with something like a look of recognition in his eyes and on his lips.

"Help us," said Ellen, whose youthful and vigorous constitution had enabled her to bear up against the privations they had suffered much better than her adopted parents. "Help us. We are perishing from cold and want of food. Help us. Pray help us."

"Help you?" ejaculated Turpin. "There is nothing on earth which I would do with greater willingness. I wish I knew how I could be of the most service to you. Let me think. Let me think."

"Only a copper, good sir—only a copper. Have pity upon us. We are hungry. Only a copper."

It was Mrs. Davis who spoke.

She had failed to recognise their preserver, and so made this appeal for alms in a whining voice.

The words cut Dick to the heart.

Between the old couple and himself there had for a long time existed a warm feeling; and those only who know what it is to be isolated can tell how much the highwayman thought of his friends, and how their manifest distress touched him.

"I must find you all a place of shelter, if I can," said Dick, addressing himself more to Ellen, who, however, listened eagerly to his words. "That is if it is in my power. I don't know where to turn to find what I require. Time, too, is precious. Chance must do it. I have trusted more than once before to its guidance, and I hope that it will once more befriend me."

"I knew you would help us," said Ellen, the tears streaming down her cheeks. "I have so longed that we might meet you, and I have my wish at last."

"You have," said Dick. "I wish that you had seen me sooner."

"I will tell you all that has happened since you saw us last at the first opportunity, but the condition of my father and mother demands attention first."

"You still call them by that title?"

"I do. My own parents I never knew—cannot in the least remember; but they have well supplied their place."

"I am glad to hear you say as much, and gladder still to find that you are grateful to them for it! But follow me. No, stay! I have a fresh idea! Here is a purse containing a large sum! Take it and make the best use of it. I should recommend you to take up your quarters at an inn for a little while, during which I will try if I cannot find you a place where you can permanently remain."

Ellen took the purse reluctantly.

Dick observed it.

"Believe me!" he said, "I have business of the greatest importance under hand, in which time is of especial importance! I have undertaken to perform something by a stated time! Do not, then, think me unkind if I do not set about it at once."

"But how shall we find you again?"

"I will tell you. Take a lodging at some quiet out of the way inn, and as soon as you have made the old folks comfortable, bend your steps to the 'White Horse,' in Drury Lane. You know the place?"

"Quite well."

"If you will recollect, I sent you there upon a former occasion. Find the same person you then spoke to, old Matthew, the landlord. Tell him where you are to be found, and I will come to you and take you to a place where the remainder of their days may be spent in peace."

"You are very—very kind!" sobbed Ellen.

"Pho—pho! Say no more, I beg! Do you quite understand the directions I have given you?"

"Quite."

"That is well, then, or rather all will be well, if you will carry them out. Now, farewell! It will not be long before you see me again! Farewell!"

"Farewell, Tom!" he added, making a last effort to rouse his old friend. "Farewell!"

But the attempt, like the preceding ones, was a failure. With a deep sigh Dick turned round and mounted his mare, after once more bidding Ellen good-bye.

This little incident did not occupy much time, but still the dawn had now fully come, and distant objects could be tolerably well distinguished.

Another half hour and the largest portion of the inhabitants of the city would be astir.

It behoved Dick, therefore, to make what speed he could to his destination, or he would stand but a poor chance of reaching it unperceived.

The distance, however, was but short, and in something less than half an hour afterwards he trotted into Drury-lane.

That usually busy thoroughfare was now completely deserted. Not even a solitary watchman could be seen.

Upon this state of things Dick congratulated himself, and he increased his speed, for he could not tell how long it would continue.

The well-known corner was reached in safety, and as the highwayman believed, without anyone having seen him. The secret spring which rang the bell was pressed, and he waited patiently.

Some time elapsed, and as he was impatient to be admitted, he pressed the spring again.

Scarcely, however, had he done so, than the door was flung open by old Matthew, for no one else was allowed to answer that bell but himself.

His astonishment at seeing Turpin was so great, that it quite took away the faculty of speech, and he stared at him with wide open eyes and mouth.

Then the idea darted into his mind that Dick had been killed, and that it was the ghost of the celebrated highwayman and his steed that stood before him.

But that idea was dissipated almost as soon as it was engendered, for Dick cried—

"Now, Matthew! Let us come in, my friend! It's all right."

He clasped the landlord's hand as he spoke.

"Dick!" he said; "Dick! Is it really you?"

"Of course it is! Stand out of the way! Don't block the door up with that great paunch of yours, but let me come in."

But instead of responding to this in the way he generally did, Matthew held out his hand, and pushed Dick away.

"Be off!" he said. "Be off! You must be mad, clean—stark, staring mad! Be off, I tell you!"

"Won't you let me in?"

"Of course not. Do you think I want you nabbed and scragged?"

"Stuff! Let me in, I say."

"Shan't!"

"But you shall, or if you don't, I'll never come near you any more."

The implication of this threat was enough to make Matthew draw back, and Dick took advantage of the movement to walk in, and lead his mare after him.

He then closed the door behind him, and, turning to the landlord, said—

"Now, Matthew, what is the matter with you? Speak out at once. Come."

"Speak out. It don't want speaking out that I knows of."

"But it does."

"Well, then, ain't it enough you were nearly nabbed in Stanhope-street?"

"No. What of that?"

"What of it? Everything. The officers suspect my house. They will first surround, and then search it, when nabbed you will be to a certainty."

"Nonsense, Matthew, you have only just woke up from a sound sleep. That is it, I am sure. Come with me, and take Bess into the stable. I will then tell you what has befallen me since we parted, and give you my reasons for returning here."

"Oh! very well. Come on. It don't much matter. We are both 'one for that's very clear."

"Stuff and nonsense. It's all right, I tell you."

Most reluctantly old Matthew fastened the door opening into White Horse-yard, and conducted the highwayman to the stable.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN OBTAINING SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RESPECTING BLANCHE AND ADRIAN WINBERRY.

DICK TURPIN would have trusted old Matthew to do almost anything, but there was one exception.

He would not allow him, or any other living human being, to place Bess in the stable, and see her properly fed and littered down.

He always did this himself, and while he was so engaged, he managed in a few words to give an outline of what had taken place since they had last seen each other.

He concluded with these words—

"Now, Matthew, I want you to go over into Bow-street to your old friend the costumer's, and bring him here with you."

"I don't mind."

"Let him bring a disguise with him. Which should you think would be most suitable?"

Matthew considered a moment, and then he said—

"A lawyer's, I should think."

"So should I. That is a capital idea. Let it be a lawyer's. I should get on best with that."

"I suppose it's no good asking you not to run the risk?"

"Not a bit."

"I thought not. I am getting tired of it. I can tell you, I have never been successful as yet."

"And never will be, for when I once make up my mind to a thing, you may be sure there is no turning me."

"I think that is about the truth."

"You may rely upon it. Now, Matthew, will you do as I desire?"

"I will."

"That's settled. You had better start at once. You perfectly understand what I require?"

"Perfectly."

"Stop a moment, though! I would not let you interrupt me while I was speaking, but now I am very anxious to learn something about Tom Davis."

"Oh! ah! yes. I had forgotten that again! Well, you must know, very soon after Tom King's escape, when he was had up before the magistrate."

"Yes; I recollect that. I was at his house during the time."

"Very good, or I ought to say, very bad. Soon after that it came time for his licence to be renewed, and his application was not granted. They refused it on the ground of his having harboured dangerous characters, and that will be the way with me one of these days."

"Pho—pho!"

"It's all very well to say 'pho! pho!' Tom Davis would have done the same, I dare say, but you see the result! Well, after the licence was refused, he still lived in the old place, but the police made a regular crusade against him, and as misfortunes never come single, one night the house was burned down, and Tom Davis, with his wife and daughter, only escaped with their lives. Everything else was destroyed!"

"What became of them then?"

"No one knew, and I had never heard a word about them until you spoke to-night! Poor Tom! I am very, very sorry for him!"

"So am I!"

"Why did he not call here before, I wonder?"

"I don't know, without it was his independent spirit. I know he was one who would prefer to starve a thousand times, than ask charity once!"

"And you found him starving, Dick?"

"Yes, and reduced to such an extremity as to be quite unconscious of what was taking place around him?"

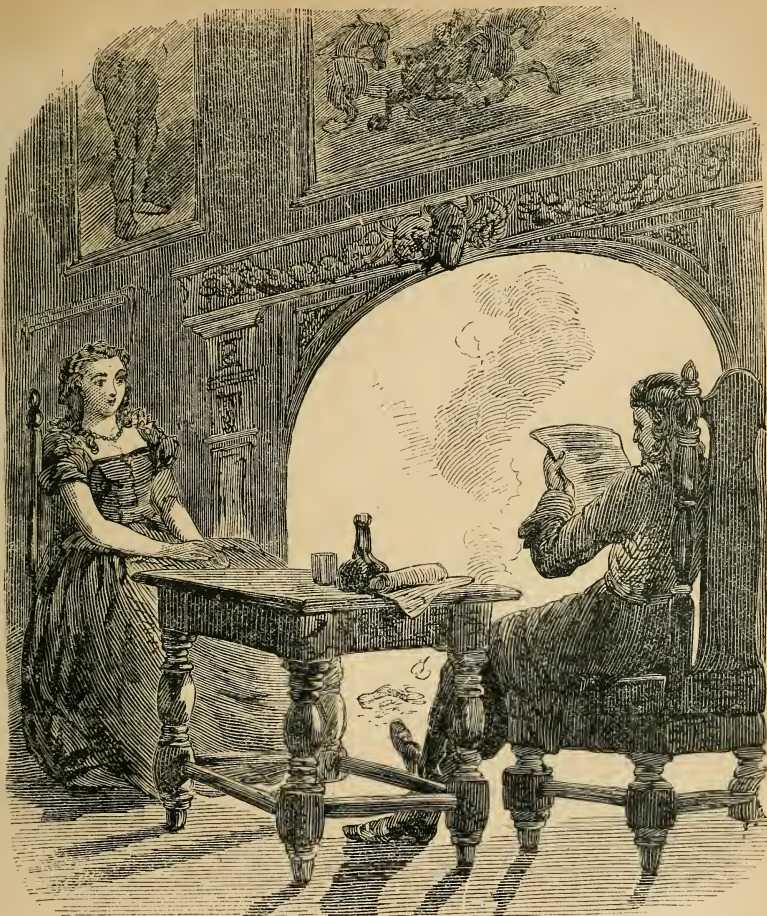
"But you gave them every assistance in your power?"

"To be sure I did."

"Then God bless you for it, Dick. It was a noble action, and I like you a thousand times better than before."

"I did no more than I ought."

"True; but yet how few would have done as you have? And you are not content, but must do more. Well, well! I hope you will succeed. It will not be your fault if Tom does not end his days in peace! I trust, too, you will succeed in the other enterprise you have undertaken."



[DICK TURPIN'S SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.]

"Thanks! Prove the sincerity of your words by going to the costumier's at once and bringing him back with the articles required."

Matthew started off without delay, and soon returned, bringing the old man with him, who made a most respectful bow as soon as he saw Dick.

About two hours afterwards a rather remarkable-looking individual stepped off the door-steps of the "White Horse," and walked down Drury-lane in the direction of the Strand.

He was of medium height, and a peculiar stoop in the shoulders made him look shorter than he actually was.

Upon his head he wore a carefully-brushed hat, which gave token of having seen better days.

Beneath this hat appeared a light flaxen peruke, such as was generally worn at the period.

But this had a faded and indifferent look like the hat.

The face was very smooth shaven.

The attire was that worn by attorneys, and to complete

the costume, he carried a blue bag in his left hand, while he supported himself with a stick, for he seemed to have a little lameness in one foot.

Many people passed him, but few favoured him with a second glance.

Our readers can, of course, guess who this person was.

It was Dick Turpin.

So well disguised, and, to use the theatrical term, his "get up" so complete and excellent, that it would have absolutely defied detection.

Surely that was the garb under which none of his foes would look to see him.

No nervousness of step—no hasty glancing from side to side—as if in momentary dread of being seen by some one whose gaze he much wished to avoid, marred the effect of the whole disguise; on the contrary, he walked firmly and steadily, and as though he had nothing whatever to fear.

Dick made his way direct to the Strand, and reached it by passing down Drury-court, now much altered since the erection of the large printing-offices on its eastern side.

Close by St. Mary's Church were several hackney carriages waiting to be hired.

He hailed one of them by holding up his stick, and directed the jerry to drive him to Birdcage-walk.

Off went the cumbersome and obsolete conveyance.

Dick leaned back in the seat and closed his eyes.

He did that to shut out external objects, which always disturb the train of thought, and buried himself in deep reflection.

The stopping of the carriage aroused him, and upon looking through the window he saw he had reached his destination.

"Which house do you want, your honour?" asked the driver.

"The one where the murder was committed!"

"The haunted house?"

"Yes, that is it."

"You will have to go round. It's the backs of these here houses what looks into the park."

"Drive round to the front, then, and be quick about it."

The order was obeyed; and in a few moments the carriage again stopped.

This time before the quaint and antique portal of the haunted house.

The driver got down off his box, and opened the door for Dick to alight.

He then gave the man a liberal fare and told him to drive off.

Turpin watched him down the street, and as soon as he had turned a corner and got out of sight, he (Turpin) ascended the steps and knocked at the massive door.

He had not learned it from any authority, but he came to the conclusion that the whole of the premises would be in the charge of police-officers until the inquest took place.

It was a bold and daring feat to make his way to this place, but Turpin was one who believed in the policy of going to head-quarters for information.

Certainly, here he would ascertain everything he wished to know, but by following his actions we shall learn how far his boldness carried him.

No notice was taken of his first summons for admittance, so he repeated it, and this time with much greater vigour than before.

Ere he released the knocker, the door was flung open, and a police-officer that Dick had seen many a time, and whom he knew instantly, appeared upon the threshold.

"Good morning," said Dick, in a plausible voice, and making a very deep bow as he spoke, "good morning."

At the same time he managed to cross the doorstep and stand in the hall, and with so much tact was it done that the officer gave way before him.

"What do you want, sir?" he asked, rather gruffly—it would have been very gruffly only he saw by the costume that his visitor was a member of the legal profession.

Dick made no reply—at least, no verbal reply, but introduced the thumb and forefinger of his right hand into his waistcoat pocket and drew forth a guinea.

This, with a sly dry cough, and holding up his blue bag with his left hand to conceal the action, he placed in the police-officer's palm.

The effect of the contact was wonderful and instantaneous.

His whole manner changed, and he made quite a low bow as he asked—

"What did you please to want, sir? Should you like to see the stiff 'un?"

CHAPTER CCLVII.

DICK TURPIN AT THE HAUNTED HOUSE LEARNS IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

"SHUT the door first!" said Dick Turpin, altering his voice as much as he could, so as to prevent any familiar tone reaching the officer's ears.

"Certain!" sir, with all the pleasure in life. One moment!"

The officer hastily closed the door and secured it.

Dick felt a great deal of confidence in his disguise, for this man evidently did not suspect him, and yet, he was quite familiar with his ordinary appearance.

As soon as the door was shut Turpin spoke.

"My errand here is quite legitimate," he said, "please bear that in mind. My errand is perfectly legitimate."

"Of course it is, sir!" said the officer as he fingered the guinea about in his trousers' pocket. "I am quite aware of that."

"Very good. But in order that you may have no scruples at all, I will tell you at once what business brings me to this place."

"Just so, sir."

"A murder was committed here the night before last?"

"There was."

"Has the murdered man been identified?"

"No, he hasn't; leastways, not yet, though a good many have come to look at him."

"So I suppose. When does the inquest take place?"

"In about half-an-hour, sir."

"Where?"

"Here."

"In this house?"

"Yes."

"Oh! well, my friend, my business here is the same it seems as several more. I want to look at the body and identify it if I can."

"I thought so, sir. Please to come this way. The body is on the second floor. A good many persons have been to look, but you are the first gentleman."

Probably Dick was the first who had given him anything.

In a most amiable and obsequious mood, the officer preceded him up the stairs.

He was rather stout, was that officer, and the going up stairs took all his wind, so he said nothing during the ascent.

The landing where Dick had stood and seen the murder committed was reached in a few seconds.

The door leading into the room was closed.

The officer tapped at it, however, and it was opened from the inner side by one of his companions.

"Here's a gentleman come to identify the body, Jim," he said, and then, turning to Turpin, he added, "my post is downstairs in the hall; but Jim here will show you every attention."

With that the first officer left the room and went downstairs again.

Dick glanced at the officer who had been called Jim.

His face was familiar to him likewise.

The success which he had achieved with the first guinea encouraged him to invest another in the same manner, so he went through exactly the same performance.

The munificence of the gift produced an immense amount of morigeration upon the part of the officer.

He touched his hat and muttered his thanks.

Dick's eye then fell upon an object in the middle of the floor.

The shutters had been thrown open, and some of the dust cleaned off the window panes, which allowed the light to penetrate, but otherwise not a single article in the apartment had been touched.

The table and the curious high-backed chair in which the old man had sat were just in their former position. The black lantern was lying overturned upon the floor.

Between the table and the chair was a huddled-up mass of something covered over with a white sheet.

Although no portion of the object itself was visible, yet Turpin knew very well what it was.

The officer advanced, and turned down the sheet a little way, so that the head and shoulders of the dead body were exposed to view.

During his strange career, it had been the lot of Dick Turpin to look upon many horrible and ghastly spectacles, yet he thought this was more horrible than any he had ever seen, without it was that of the man he had found in the subterranean apartment beneath the woodman's hut.

The face was shattered terribly, so much so indeed, as almost to destroy all the features.

The pistol had been discharged within half an inch of his ear, and one half of the face was literally blown away.

Dick turned away. His heart heaved at the awful sight.

The police-officer covered the white sheet over it again.

"Do you know him, sir?" asked Jim.

"It is hard to say from what I have just seen."

"Very true, sir. He's an awful object, that's certain."

"Dreadful!"

"I could see it gave you a bit of a turn. But, lor' bles you, sir, you will soon get used to it!"

"Has the body been searched?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who searched it?"

"The surgeon."

"What did he find?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing?"

"No."

"Not a card, or a scrap of paper, or anything of that sort?"

"No, his pockets were quite empty."

"That is strange. Then, beyond the face, there is nothing by which he can be identified?"

"Nothing at all, but leastways, I forgot, there is his clothes."

"Oh! ah! to be sure, there's his clothes."

"Should you like to see them, sir?"

"No, no, never mind. Have you anything to sit down upon?"

"I don't feel very well."

"Not in this room I haven't, sir," replied Jim. "I am keeping guard in the next. Would you like to step in there?"

"Yes, if you will allow me."

"Oh! certainly. Please to walk this way."

"There is a question or two I should like to ask you."

"All right, sir; I am sure it will give me very great pleasure to give you all the information I possess, for you are a real gentleman and no mistake."

With this complimentary speech upon his lips, Jim, the officer, ushered Dick Turpin into the adjoining room, through which, it will be recollected, the cloaked stranger and his two accomplices had effected their retreat.

A fire was burning in the grate, and the room had altogether quite an inhabited look.

There was a table and two or three chairs.

In one of the latter, which Jim placed close by the fire-side, Dick sat down.

On the table was a pipe and a stone jug, with which the officer had been regaling himself, and beguiling the tediousness of his employment.

He looked rather shyly at them for a moment, and Dick perceiving it, soon put him at his ease.

"Have you anything to drink there?" he asked. "If you have, I shall be glad, for I can't get that sight out of my head."

"Yes, here is a drop if you would like it."

"Thank you."

Dick took the proffered jug, and found its contents to be some excellent old ale, to which he did ample justice, and then handed it to Jim, who, with the characteristic salutation, "I look towards you, sir!" took a hearty draught.

After this they felt quite old friends, and the officer resumed his pipe.

"Your companion in the hall told me the inquest would be held here in half-an-hour," began Turpin.

"Yes, that is the case."

"But where are the jury to sit?"

"Oh! they won't sit here. They will come and view the body, and sit in the club-room of the 'Bull and Gate,' round the corner."

"Oh! ah! I thought so. Well, now I may as well tell you that a client of mine, an old gentleman, is missing. I don't say that is him in the next room, but I couldn't swear that it is not. However, I shall stay here to watch the case, you understand, in case anything should turn up in the evidence."

"Quite right, sir."

"In the meantime, I should be very glad if you would favour me with an account of all you know of the murder, as it may be of the utmost importance to me."

"Of course, sir. You have, I fancy, come to the right party, for I know all about the affair from beginning to end."

"Oh! do you, indeed? Then I am very glad to hear it."

"Very good, sir."

The officer, who was an intelligent man of his class, then proceeded to give a full account of the affair, but as the reader is already acquainted with the particulars, we need do no more than say, that he was the very man who had seen the cloaked stranger and his followers enter the

house, and who had returned the moment after the commission of the murder.

Much of this was quite new to Dick, especially that part where Adrian was caught and taken to Newgate, under the belief that he was the famous highwayman.

But the reader's knowledge only extends to a certain point, and therefore we shall resume Jim, the officer's, narrative at that place.

It will be recollected that we have described how the mistake was discovered, and how the cloaked stranger had demanded to be released, and how, at that moment, there came a violent knocking at the wicket of Newgate.

At this point we resume.

CHAPTER COLVIII.

A VERDICT OF WILFUL MURDER IS RETURNED AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY AND HIS TWO ACCOMPLICES.

"Of course," continued Jim, the officer, "everybody stopped still, and the governor—that is Mr. Cawthorne, you know—shut his mouth in the middle of what he was saying."

"The man on the lock, however, turned the key, and opened the door at once."

"In came a party of officers with two prisoners."

"The moment they got inside, the two prisoners, who were men, uttered an ejaculation which showed that they and the man who had been brought to Newgate in mistake for Dick Turpin, were acquainted with each other."

"The outer door was closed, and then, in answer to Mr. Cawthorne, who asked who the prisoners were, one of the officers stated what had taken place in the haunted house, and how they had captured two of the culprits, while one had made his escape into St. James's-park, and the other over the house-tops."

"But," interrupted Turpin, "I thought you told me that three men only were seen to enter the house?"

"Quite right, sir, but then there might have been one left inside. At any rate, there is very good evidence that there were four of them altogether."

"Oh! indeed."

"Yes—but let me go on."

"Oh! yes, go on. It is the most wonderful story I ever heard in my life. Take a pinch of snuff."

"Thank you, sir. Well, this man—I mean the one who was taken in mistake for Dick Turpin—disclaimed all knowledge of, and acquaintance with, the two prisoners, and with all that had taken place."

"Did he?"

"Yes; but yet it was thought there was sufficient grounds for keeping him in custody, and bringing him before a magistrate."

"And was this done?"

"Yes, sir. All three were locked up in separate cells, and brought before the magistrate in the morning."

"And what then?"

"All three were committed to take their trial. His worship would have allowed bail for the one, but nobody came forward, so he was carried off along with the rest."

"And do you think he had any hand in the murder?"

"Well, that's more than I can tell."

"Did you find anything of the man who escaped over the roofs?"

"No."

"Had you any idea of who he was or what he was like?"

"None at all. It was quite dark at night, and we lost sight of him almost directly."

"It is a strange piece of business altogether?"

"Very, sir. Now, I have had a good deal of experience, one way and another with murder, but this beats them all."

"I should think we shall learn something at the inquest that will give a clue. I was in hopes some paper had been found, but you tell me there has not?"

"No; there was nothing. Suspicion is very strong upon the three men in custody, don't you think?"

"On two, certainly. They declare that they merely acted by the directions of the man in the cloak; but he altogether disowns them, and says he never saw them in his life before."

"Very odd. What's that?"

"The jurymen, I suppose. At any rate there is some one knocking at the door."

Jim rose and so did Dick.

"I will go now," said the latter.

"There's no occasion, sir. Perhaps you had better be here when they view the body, in case anything should turn up?"

"Well, perhaps it will be better. Tom will let them in."

At this moment there came a tapping at the door of the chamber of death, and the officer hastened to open it.

As he expected, the jurymen were outside, and the whole body of them, headed by the coroner, and the rear brought up by the beadle, entered.

The coroner perceived Dick, and made a slight inclination of his head, while a look of inquiry appeared upon his face.

The highwayman understood what it meant, so he, too, bowed, and then said—

"Pardon me for this intrusion, but I am a solicitor, and hearing of this murder I came up to town this morning in order to look at the body, as desired by a client of mine."

"Oh! indeed, sir."

"Yes; that is it."

"And do you identify it?"

"Not at present, sir."

"What do you mean by not at present?"

"I mean that the features are so much destroyed as to make recognition, by means of an inspection of them merely, quite impossible; but I think it probable that something may transpire, and therefore wish to be present at the inquest."

"Oh! certainly, sir—certainly. I have no objection whatever; and if this fearfully dark affair can be cleared up, no one will rejoice more than myself."

"I, too, shall be glad."

"Now, gentlemen," said the coroner, addressing the jurymen, "be good enough to stand round, and we will proceed to view the body. Mr. Tripp, turn down the sheet."

Mr. Tripp was the name of the parish beadle, and as soon as the coroner spoke he hustled forward and did his bidding, after which he stood looking on in a majestic attitude.

One by one the jurymen looked at the cold and hideous corpse, and Turpin, though he strove to look another way, found it impossible to withdraw his gaze.

This ceremony occupied but little time. Most took but one glance, though some of a more morbid turn of mind made a close examination.

This done, the party adjourned to the public-house Jim, the officer, had spoken of.

Turpin followed.

He shrunk a little, though, when he got to the bottom of the stairs, for several police-officers were in the hall, and among them was his old enemy, Mr. Wiggles.

The two officers, who had been left in charge of the house, were relieved from their duty as their presence was required at the inquest.

It was only the first sight that startled Dick. He recovered his composure almost instantly, and walked steadily forward.

His disguise was about to be put to a severe test, but if Mr. Wiggles did not recognise him, he should feel tolerably certain of escaping detection altogether.

The individual in question gave a good look at him, but Dick returned his gaze without flinching.

But the redoubtable police-officer took no further notice, from which the highwayman inferred that he was unknown.

The distance from the haunted house to the "Bull and Gate" inn was only about a couple of hundred yards, so that Dick was not for long exposed to the gaze of the people in the street.

The inn was one of those rambling, comfortable places which our forefathers delighted to build.

It was tolerably full of company, for the murder had caused what would now-a-days be called a "sensation."

The large room on the first-floor had been set aside for the inquest.

With as little delay as possible the jurymen seated themselves round the table, and the coroner sat down in the arm-chair at its head.

The investigation was commenced.

In the examination of the different witnesses, however, very little additional information was gathered.

Turpin was seated at a little side-table where he could see and hear all that was going forward.

He was much struck with the appearance of Adrian Winberry, for such he announced his name to be.

In him he could scarcely recognise the cloaked stranger, who wore so conspicuous a black beard.

His face was smooth-shaven, in accordance with the prevailing fashion.

A lawyer defended him.

But all his eloquence, and he was a perfect master of the art of rhetoric, failed to remove the suspicion which hung around his client.

The two men when they were examined endeavoured to set aside what they had previously said.

That they had witnessed the murder they did not deny, but they stated they had been employed by a stranger to accompany him to the house where they were found, and that the murder was committed without their having any idea of it and without their being able to prevent it.

Adrian Winberry smiled in a triumphant and defiant manner when this statement was made; but there was not so much importance attached to it as he evidently expected.

The former words which they had made use of were distinctly sworn to by several witnesses.

That they had been tampered with somehow or other, and induced to depart from their original declaration, there could not be much doubt, and the coroner expressed an opinion to that effect.

A verdict of wilful murder was then recorded against the three prisoners.

The lawyer engaged by Mr. Winberry then rose, and in an eloquent speech proposed that his client should be released on bail; but the application was peremptorily refused.

Dick had taken rough notes of the chief events which had transpired, but otherwise he took no part in the proceedings whatever.

When all was over, he, having full confidence in his disguise, went to different places and purchased all the accounts of the murder that were published.

By the time he had finished it was nearly dark, so he bent his steps in the direction of the "White Horse."

By virtue of the previous committal, Adrian Winberry and his two accomplices were conveyed to Newgate.

But the unnatural brother had by no means lost hope, and his peculiar line of conduct will quickly become apparent.

CHAPTER CCLIX.

DICK TURPIN REPORTS THE SUCCESS OF HIS MISSION TO THE MYSTERIOUS LADY.

THE hour was verging upon midnight when a single horseman took his way, at a rapid pace, along the western road.

The clattering of his steed's hoofs was the only sound that broke the silence which reigned round.

There was no moon as yet, but the stars shone brightly over head, and in the eastern horizon could be seen some faint indication of the coming of the queen of night.

Occasionally the horseman shifted his riding whip—which he carried more for defence than aught else—from his right hand to his left, and when he did so he would pat his steed on the neck and speak to it in an encouraging tone of voice, and by the way in which the beautiful creature tossed her head and neighed, it would seem as though she perfectly comprehended what he said.

Our readers cannot be at a loss to recognise this horse and rider.

It was Dick Turpin, mounted on his bonny mare, Black Bess, on his way to keep his appointment with the young and beautiful lady, whose name was unknown to him at present.

His thoughts, however, ran greatly upon the daring scheme which he had formed and almost carried out.

He was thinking of the young prince and the disappointment he would feel.

Some means or other must be found of communicating with him.

It was not possible for Dick to think of this without remembering his three friends, from whom he had been so long separated.

He wondered what they were doing and where they were.

They might not even have reached the shores of France in safety.

He had not heard a single word of them from that morning when they parted on the little plateau in front of the entrance to the cavern which had been the scene of so many remarkable events.

Between Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack and himself there had not existed that feeling of intimacy and friendship that there did between him and Tom King.

The latter he felt the warmest possible interest in, and the feeling could not have been greater if he had been his own brother.

It would have been a satisfaction to him of no ordinary character if he could have felt certain of his welfare and his safety.

He would, too, have much liked to have had his assistance in the affair he had then under hand. It would have been invaluable.

He determined, however, as soon as he had brought it to a conclusion, provided he did not hear or see anything of his comrade in the meantime, to set out at once in quest of him.

The moon rose.

Her beams at first were sickly, few, and faint, but they soon increased in power, bringing out the different objects in the landscape with marvellous distinctness.

"The road is empty to-night," muttered Dick. "I have not met a single person since I fairly got clear of London. Well, perhaps it is as well, for I should not be able to resist the temptation of stopping them, and it might only serve to place the officers upon my track, and I shall have sufficient trouble with this business without that. Woe, mare. Gently, lass—gently. What is it?"

Black Bess had reared suddenly when Dick spoke.

He was paying no attention to what he was about, and had been a less practised rider than he was, he would inevitably have been thrown.

As it was, he retained his seat in the saddle with great difficulty, for his usually docile mare paid no attention to the soothing words he uttered, and the attempts he made to calm her by patting her upon the neck.

Much surprised at this extraordinary behaviour, he looked up to see what it was which had produced it.

His eyes fell upon a spectacle that was quite enough to fill the heart of any one with dread and horror.

Just where a narrow winding lane turned off from the high-road was a gibbet.

From its blackened cross-beam depended a ghastly and horrible burden.

It was the body of a man.

Many and many a long year must have elapsed since that malefactor was suspended there as a terror and a warning to others.

Spring winds, summer suns, autumn rains, and winter frosts, had all wreaked their repeated effects upon it.

The long and massive iron links, with which the body was held together and hung from the top, were corroded with rust.

They cracked and clanked dismally, however, as the fitful gusts of cold night air blew upon it, and made it swing slightly to and fro.

Here and there the bleached bones of the doomed man glistered with a sickening lustre in the moonlight.

In one or two places, too, something that looked like long strips of clothing fluttered in the wind.

It was loathsome to the eye—to the ear—to the smell—and well indeed may the highwayman's mare be excused for the alarm she manifested.

Turpin himself, although a shudder of horror swept over his whole form, could not for a moment remove his gaze, which seemed to be riveted and fascinated.

By an effort, however, he broke the spell, and turned his eyes in another direction.

But he was unable thus easily to remove Bess's fear. She brained and reared, nor could he by any means calm her down.

His way lay directly past that gibbet, but his mare resolutely refused to pass.

To have punished her for this natural alarm would not only have been cruel, but futile, and he knew it.

He dropped the reins, therefore, upon her neck, and placed his riding-whip between his teeth, where he held it firmly.

This left both hands at liberty, so, stooping forward, he placed one over each of his mare's eyes, thus shutting out entirely from her view the horrible object which had so much alarmed her.

The ruse succeeded.

He struck her flanks lightly with his heels, and she obeyed the impulse forward readily.

The road was level and unobstructed, so he allowed her to go for some distance in this manner, and then he gradually removed his hands, and resumed his hold upon the reins.

The alarm of Black Bess had ceased as soon as the gibbet was shut out from her view, and she went on now quietly enough.

In a little while now the stone front of the house came in view, and he quickened her speed slightly, for he feared he was behind his time.

Orders had been left at the lodge for him to be admitted, for, so soon as he reached the entrance gates, they were flung open.

Dick trotted up the gravelled path, taking the same route precisely as he had done the preceding evening, when in company with the carriage.

The little door before which they had stopped was soon reached, and at it stood the steward who had played the part of coachman.

Seeing this, Dick alighted, but scarcely had his feet touched the ground, when a slight figure, shrouded in a large dark cloak, bounded forward.

It was the mysterious lady.

The steward led Black Bess towards the stables.

"Pardon me," he said, "I must see her housed."

"Ah! yes, I had forgotten. But I am so impatient."

"I will be back as quickly as possible. I have much to tell you."

Turpin hurried off after the steward as he spoke, who had almost got out of sight.

We need do no more than say that Dick saw his mare properly attended to, and then, in company with the steward, returned.

Under the direction of the latter, he was led to the same apartment as before.

The steward knocked lightly at the door, and in a low, sweet voice the lady said,

"Come in."

The steward opened the door and ushered Dick in.

The lady was standing near the fire.

With her left hand she leaned rather heavily upon the corner of the massive oaken table.

There are some faces which look beautiful when first seen, but which fade under a second examination.

But the lady's was not one of these.

On the contrary, Dick thought she looked even more lovely than before.

Anxiety—the most intense anxiety and suspense—were depicted upon her countenance, and she looked into Dick's face with the utmost intenceness, in order to gather something from its expression, if possible.

The highwayman advanced, and in obedience to a sign given him, seated himself in the antique arm-chair by the fireside.

The lady, too, sank back into a seat.

As on the preceding occasion there was no light in the room save that which came from the fire.

But its beams were very, very bright, though somewhat flickering and unsteady.

It was only after two efforts that the lady found her voice to ask for the news which Turpin brought her.

"Tell me—tell me all at once, I beg. Pray do not keep me any longer in suspense. You cannot tell what a fearful state of anxiety I have been in all day, and how I have longed for night to come. I have learned the worst, surely. You cannot have any more evil intelligence to communicate. Speak, and tell me!"

"Willingly, lady; but I must ask you to be calm. You have nothing further to dread."

"And Blanche—Blanche, where is she? What have you learned respecting her? Where is she?"

Turpin shook his head.

"That is more than I can tell; but for your sake, lady, I will know no rest until I find out."

CHAPTER CCLX.

DICK TURPIN FINDS A PLACE OF REFUGE FOR TOM DAVIS AND ELLEN, AND FOR HIMSELF AS WELL.

A SLIGHT flush suffused the lady's cheeks as Turpin uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded.

"Thanks," she said, with a faint smile, which was the only notice she took of the highwayman's bold speech.

We have followed Turpin through all his adventures in London, and therefore we will not tire the reader by repeating them.

Let it suffice to say he told the lady all with which the reader has been made acquainted, confining himself, of course, to that which had especial reference to her affair.

"And now," said the lady, when she had heard him to the end, and expressed her thanks for all which he had done, "And now what am I to do?"

"That is a very serious question to answer."

"I know it."

"Yet a course of action must be decided upon at once, for the trial will take place, I believe, to-morrow."

"To-morrow; surely not so soon as that."

"I think so; but midnight has passed, and to-day is here."

"Oh! I see. It is then the day after to-morrow."

"Exactly, if you take it so."

"I thought it could not be so soon as I imagined. Now what is to be done? Is such an unnatural villain as he has proved himself, to be allowed to escape the penalty due to his crime? Is he to come away from the trial in triumph and usurp my cousin's rights? Oh! no, no! that would be monstrous in the extreme."

"Do not excite yourself so much, I pray you. Such a flagrant wrong is of course not to be permitted."

"But how am I to prevent it?"

"Let us consider first and weigh the matter over, and then without a doubt we shall be able to come to a decision."

"I am much beholden to you. Your words are wise."

Turpin bowed.

"You flatter me. However, don't let us waste time in trivialities. I think in your narrative you mentioned a lawyer?"

"The one who prepared the will?"

"Yes. Is he living?"

"No."

"Is his son?"

"I believe so."

"Who is the family solicitor? for, of course, there is one."

"I am sure I cannot tell you, but I will ask the steward."

"Stay; never mind. The name is of secondary importance. You are sure there is a family solicitor?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then my advice is, you send for him at once and let him see me."

"See you?"

"Yes, it will be running a great risk, but I shall trust to his honour not to betray me."

"No, no! I cannot—will not consent to that. You have already exposed yourself a thousand times too much for my sake."

"Pardon me, lady, for interrupting you. Do not think I made this proposal without having calculated the probability of danger. I have done so, and do not find it so great as you seem to imagine. The solicitor to a family like this cannot, I should think, but be of honourable principles. He will have the interests of it at heart, and would do all that lay in his power. Do you think I am right in surmising this?"

"Doubtless you are, but —"

"Nay, do not raise objections. With your permission, I should propose that you send off for him at once—indeed, I ought to have suggested the adoption of so obvious a course before: yet still it is not too late. When he arrives I will see him—that is, with your permission. I need not reveal myself in any way, and that he will be able to recognise my features, I think hardly likely. I have had a wide experience in human nature, and I am not afraid to say that I shall be able to correctly estimate how far it will be safe to trust him at first sight. If I find that full

confidence is to be placed in him, I shall relate what I have seen, and the information I have gathered respecting the matter. At the last, should circumstances require it, I shall not scruple to disclose myself and tell him who I am."

"Oh you make me tremble with dread for your safety. No, no! this cannot be. You must think of something less dangerous to yourself."

"I am afraid, lady, I cannot."

There was a pause, during which the lady appeared to be thinking deeply.

At length she spoke.

"I cannot think of any other plan so good, but yet I am reluctant, most reluctant, to accept it. Can you not think?"

"I cannot. It seems to me that is the only course to be pursued."

"And so it seems to me."

"I am glad. As for the danger, dismiss it from your thoughts, it is no more than I incur daily. I shall be able to judge best. Let me remind you of the importance of what we are about. The circumstances are most singular. You are alone in the world—have no one to whom you can appeal for assistance and advice. It seemed like the work of Providence that I should be cast into your way as I was. It looks as though I was predestined to set this dark matter right. Most fervently indeed, do I trust that it is so! Mine has been a life in which has been enacted many a dark deed, but here and there I have had a chance of doing a good action, and I have always embraced that chance, for I have always clung to the belief that those good actions have atoned, in a great measure, for the others."

"I have heard this of you," replied the lady, who listened to all that Turpin said with the most profound interest, "and I fully believe in the correctness of your philosophy."

"It rejoices me to hear it, for it encourages me to pursue the plan of action which I had worked out. In all the good actions which I have performed there has never been so glorious a chance afforded me as this. I shall be the means, I trust, of bringing to justice as great a miscreant as could be well conceived. I shall be the means of avenging his brother's death, and keeping from him not only these estates, but also the poor girl Blanche, whose fate, though yet enveloped in obscurity, I am determined to discover."

"You speak like one who has a brave and noble heart, and in such an undertaking as this, let the past be what it may, I do not think you can come to any harm."

"I, too, have a similar conviction. And now let me request you to send off to London for the solicitor. There is no time to lose, if our efforts are to be successful."

"There is not, indeed. I will call him."

She rang a bell as she spoke.

The summons was responded to by the steward.

He was a gray-headed, honest old man, who had been in the service of the family from his birth, and he looked up to every member of it with reverence and affection.

"Shockley," said the lady, "who is the family solicitor?"

"The family solicitor?"

"Yes; what is his name—where does he live?"

"That is more than I can tell you; but I have no doubt you will find it in the library."

"Ah! A good thought. I shall find it there, surely. Fetch me a lamp."

The steward departed upon his errand, and quickly returned, bringing with him one of those curious old oil lamps, some of which may be seen in our museums.

Holding it high above his head he led the way, the lady and Turpin, by her desire, following.

A large corridor was crossed in a diagonal direction, and then an antique door was reached.

This the steward opened, and then the highwayman found himself in a large gloomy apartment, the recesses of which the light of the lamp was quite unable to reveal.

A chill air, too, seemed to come from it and strike to the blood, so that he fairly shivered.

The steward crossed the library and stopped before a shelf, upon which were several boxes containing documents of various kinds.

He placed the lamp on the table, and then took down one of these.

The lady produced a bunch of keys, and in a little while had the box open, and commenced searching among its contents.

Dick stood a few paces in the rear, for he by no means wished to appear intrusive or inquisitive in things that concerned him not.

The search in the box continued for some time, but at length a packet of letters was found.

"This will tell us what we want to know," said the lady, addressing Turpin.

As she spoke she locked the box, and rose to her feet.

Returning then to the chamber, in which they had before sat, she drew a letter from the parcel.

"The name of the solicitor appears to be Kersey—John Kersey."

"And from what place is the communication dated?"

"The Temple."

"That is enough. Does it say from what part of the Temple?"

"No. 'The Temple,' merely."

"That will be quite sufficient, and now, Shockley, you will start at once, and make all speed to this gentleman's office. You had better take the carriage. Tell him his presence here is desired upon the most urgent business, and ask him to return with you."

The steward looked at the young lady inquiringly for a moment, in order to know whether he should be doing right by taking the commands of a stranger.

She understood him, and at once added—

"Yes, that is right, Shockley. You will do precisely as this gentleman has told you, and for your late dear master's sake, and for the sake of his dear daughter Blanche, let me implore you to make all the speed you can, but do not return without bringing the lawyer with you."

"I understand you," he said. "It shall be done, and I will be as quick as it is possible for any human being to be."

"Thanks, Shockley. Depart at once."

"I am off, lady," replied the steward.

A short silence followed his departure during which both listened.

Presently they heard the trampling of hoofs, and the rumbling of wheels, which told them that Shockley had already commenced his journey.

CHAPTER CCLXI.

SOME MORE COMPLICATIONS OF THE VILLAINOUS PLOT AGAINST BLANCHE AND HER FATHER ARE MADE APPARENT.

THE remainder of the night was spent in conversation.

The lady could not retire to rest, and as for Turpin, he felt no need of it.

When morning came, breakfast was served, to which Dick and the lady sat down together.

It was while they were discussing this meal that a carriage drove up the gravelled path, and stopped before the front door.

Both started eagerly to their feet, for they, of course, supposed that it was Shockley who had returned, bringing Mr. Kersey with him.

A loud summons for admittance was given upon the knocker, and the lady, when she heard the sound, turned with an inquiring look upon her face.

"Strange visitors at the hall," she said; "that is never Shockley."

"Who can they be?"

"I have no more idea than yourself."

"What is to be done?"

"How?"

"Will they enter here?"

"Most likely."

"But—but—you comprehend me?"

"What?"

"I must not be seen by any one."

"True—true. How foolish of me to forget."

"Nay, nay. It is natural. Who can it be? I wonder?"

Tap—tap.

Some one knocked gently upon the panel of the door.

"Come in."

A servant entered.

"Mr. Josiah Skinner."

"Who?"

"Mr. Josiah Skinner."

"What does he want?"

"To see you, my lady."

"I am astonished," said the lady, turning to our hero.

"Do you not know him?"

"No. What shall I do?"

"I should recommend you to give him an interview, by all means. You know not what important intelligence he may have to communicate."

"And you?"

"Never mind. Give your servant orders to show the gentleman in here."

The lady did so, and as soon as the domestic had left the room, she turned to Dick, and said—

"Now tell me what you intend to do. Pray do not be rash, or bring yourself into danger."

"Trust me. With your permission, I should like to be a witness of this interview."

"But you must not expose yourself."

"I know it."

"What do you propose?"

"To conceal myself."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"But I see no hiding-place."

"I will soon find one if you will give me your permission."

"You have it freely."

"Well, then, if I mistake not, that is a fire-screen folded up in yonder corner?"

"It is."

"Unfold it, then, and I will hide myself behind it. I shall then be able to hear all that is said without being seen."

"Agreed. Quick! or he will be here."

The fire-screens in use in those days are not often seen now, and therefore a few lines, to convey an idea of what they were like, will not be out of place.

They were made in narrow strips about five feet high, and one in width, hinged together so that they could either be folded up into a small compass, or stretched quite across the fireplace, generally then no inconsiderable width.

They were painted with many curious devices.

A better hiding-place than that which one of these would afford could scarcely be found.

It was unfolded, then, and placed across the recess at the side of the fireplace.

Turpin stepped behind it, and scarcely had he done so, than the door opened and Mr. Josiah Skinner entered.

He was a tall, stout man, dressed in a suit of solemn black, and he made a low bow on his entrance, as he said—

"I beg you will excuse me, lady, for thus breaking in upon you, but I have some important business to transact here."

"Important business?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Skinner, coolly taking a chair, and seating himself in it. "Very important business, and I trust you will give me your attention for a few moments."

The young lady bowed.

She was too terrified to reply in any other way.

Turpin peeped cautiously and curiously through a little crevice in the fire-screen, for he anticipated that something of more than common interest was about to occur.

"In the first place," said Mr. Skinner, his tone becoming at every word more authoritative and overbearing. "In the first place, I want to know what other members of the family are in the house besides yourself?"

"By what right do you ask that question, sir?" said the young lady, assuming as much boldness of behaviour as she possibly could, though inwardly she was almost ready to sink to the ground with terror. "I think your behaviour very extraordinary, indeed."

"Do you, indeed! I will so far satisfy you as to say that I have a statement to make, and I wish it to be heard by the whole of the family, so, perhaps, to save me the trouble of continually repeating the same thing, you will call them in."

"Speak to me, sir."

"Am I to understand, then, that you are the only member of the family at present in the house?"

"You can, sir."

"Very good. Then have the kindness to listen to me."

Mr. Skinner's mode of speech kept getting more and more offensive and insolent.

"I am listening to you, sir; and perhaps you will be kind enough to put what you have to say in as few words as possible, in order that I may be relieved from your presence, which I can assure you is most distasteful to me; nor can I see anything to warrant your intrusion here."

This was a very courageous speech for the lady to make, and she would never have ventured upon it had she not felt how close she was to Dick Turpin, and that he would effectually shield her from all harm.

"Ha! ha!" said Mr. Skinner. "Very good—very good, indeed. Can't see anything to warrant my intrusion. Capital. Ha! ha! I like that. But wait a minute—wait a minute."

Mr. Skinner commenced rummaging his pockets as he spoke.

"I have already waited long enough," replied the lady. "Let me know your business here, and then depart."

"Ha! ha!" Now don't, miss; please don't. I shall die of larfin'. I know I shall. Depart? Lor' no; not yet, I hope. Bless you, miss, you and me are fated to become a great deal better acquainted with each other before I depart. We are, I can assure you. Ah! that's it."

Mr. Skinner alluded to a crumpled-looking document.

While speaking he had taken several packets of papers from his pocket, and he selected one out of the miscellaneous heap when he uttered the satisfactory ejaculation.

The lady looked on in surprise and terror.

She dreaded that something terrible was about to happen—that the presence of this insolent man heralded some calamity.

Her forebodings were right.

"You see this paper, miss," said Mr. Skinner, as he held the document in his hand. "Very well, then; that's my authority for what I'm doing, do you understand that?"

"Go on, sir."

"Very well, ve—ry well. Then listen. I, Josiah Skinner, attorney-at-law, hereby take possession of this house and all the estates and appurtenances thereto belonging, as well as everything in this house, without any exception whatever. Do you understand that?"

"I quite understand your words, sir, but on whose behalf do you take possession of this house and premises?"

"That of my client."

"And who is your client?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry, to whom the whole has been assigned for a *quid pro quo*."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed, and in fact, too. I have the fullest authority for what I come to do, and you will please to remember that it is your duty to obey me in all things."

"I shall do nothing of the kind."

"Won't you? We'll see about that. Call the servants, and save all bother by telling them all about it. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, certainly."

"And will you not obey?"

"Never! Quit the house this moment, sir. I refuse to recognise your authority. Begone, and do not let me see you another moment, or I will call the servants as you suggest, but it shall be to have you turned out."

"Turned out," said Mr. Skinner. "So it's come to turning out, has it? Then we'll soon see who is to be turned out. Now, my lady," he cried, jumping off his chair, "I have had enough of your impudence. I know who you are. You needn't think to impose upon me. Troop off this very moment. Leave the house, and never enter it again. Do you hear? Be off."

The lady uttered a faint shriek, and cried for help.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed Mr. Skinner. "It's all very fine. Call for help as much as you like. You have confessed there is no one in the house but yourself, so I shall be able to have it all my own way without any trouble. Be off with you, I say. I take possession."

The lady drew further back, but it was towards the screen behind which Turpin was concealed.

"Go," continued Mr. Skinner, following her. "Go—go of your own free will, or I will thrust you forth. Go, I say. What—you won't? then I'll make you."

He endeavoured to grasp the lady's wrist as he spoke, but ere he could do so, Dick Turpin glided from behind the screen like an apparition, while he said quietly—

"No you won't, Mr. Skinner. Just let the lady alone, if you please."

CHAPTER CCLX.

TOM KING AND HIS COMRADES, SIXTEEN STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL, COMMIT A ROBBERY UPON THE FRENCH HIGHWAY.

SUCH a long time has elapsed since we either saw or heard anything of Dick Turpin's three comrades—Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack—that we feel ourselves now in duty bound (albeit, we leave Turpin himself in rather a peculiar situation) to turn our attention to them for a little while, and describe the adventures which befel them.

The reader will remember that when we saw them last was after their shipwreck upon the rocky islet, when Claude was fortunate enough to perceive a sail.

It was only just in time.

The limit of their endurance had been reached.

Hunger, thirst, heat, cold, all had done their work as they alternately oppressed them, and on that evening of the second day after the shipwreck they were in such a deplorable condition that it is very questionable whether they could have survived till sunrise.

The cold upon that barren sea-washed rock during the long winter nights was most intense.

But Claude had been fortunate enough to perceive a sail, and as soon as he felt sure that it was no delusion of the senses, he had stripped off his shirt, and holding it by the sleeves let it flutter out like a flag.

Fortunately for them the signal was perceived, and the ship's course was turned towards them.

They approached as close as they could with safety, and then a boat was lowered.

When they hailed the ship, they did not think of the danger of their position in case it should prove to be an English one. That danger was prospective—the present was immediate.

But it seemed as though at last the tide of fortune was to turn in their favour.

The ship was not an English one, but the French man-of-war of which the boatman had spoken.

He knew it again in a moment, and lost no time in communicating the joyful intelligence to our friends.

In a little while they were all on board, and as soon as they stated who they were, the greatest attention was paid to them.

The surgeon was sent for to examine their hurts, but they were nothing to speak of; and after partaking of some refreshment and enjoying a long sleep, the three highwaymen woke up, feeling very little the worse for their adventure beyond a sensation of weakness, which would at times seize upon them.

In the morning they came on deck.

They were making all speed for France.

Our friends felt very far from satisfied with their position.

Now and then they would wish they had never seen the Pretender, or embarked themselves in his cause, but being in they determined to go on, and never once thought of beating a retreat.

The young prince himself, whose frame was not so hardened as those of the highwaymen were, was still below in his hammock.

As evening was coming on the three friends strolled aft, and leaning over the taffrail conversed together upon various topics, chiefly the adventures they had severally in the course of a long career met with.

While thus engaged, they perceived in the distance something, which a closer investigation showed them to be a ship.

They looked at it for a long time unthinkingly.

Tom King was the first to notice that it was sailing dead in their wake, and evidently sailing at a much greater rate of speed than they were.

Then the idea suddenly darted into their minds that it was a vessel in chase of them, and they were about to hint as much to the captain, when they found that the sail had already been seen, and its character made out.

A scene of great apparent confusion now ensued, as the



[TOM KING COMMITS A HIGHWAY ROBBERY UPON THE CALAIS ROAD.]

sailors sprang into the rigging to execute the orders which were given them to crowd all sail.

And now the ship came close enough for the highwaymen to be able to make out her character.

She was an English man-of-war, and one of the largest they had ever seen.

An encounter would be inevitable.

They saw that at once.

The excellence of the English over the French ship in point of sailing, was evident; for despite all the efforts which the latter made, they could not increase their distance from her.

On the contrary, little experienced as our three friends were in nautical affairs, they could see that the English man-of-war was rapidly gaining upon them, and that an engagement was imminent.

The captain of the vessel upon which they stood evidently by no means wished to tackle the enemy. His policy was to run away.

He had only one chance in fear of doing this, and

that was, night might come upon them and enable them to get away from their adversary under cover of the darkness.

This was rather a forlorn hope.

Night was coming on, it is true; but then some hours would elapse before it was actually dark, and during that time the English vessel would be able to come up with them.

Every stitch of canvas they carried was spread to the breeze, and the masts cracked and bent to the strain.

Whether their escape had been discovered, and the ship sent out to re-capture them, was of course more than the highwaymen could tell, yet it looked very probable.

If so, the utmost exertions would be made to overtake them.

It might, however, merely be an English vessel or a privateer.

At any rate, on it came, and with extreme rapidity.

Preparations were made upon the French vessel for a fight.

The guns were run out, loaded, and put ready for immediate service, while small arms, such as swords, pistols, etc., were served out to the crew.

The shades of evening drew on.

The sun sank behind an immense bank of clouds on the north-west horizon.

Still on came the pursuing vessel.

"Look! look!" exclaimed Claude Duval to his two comrades, and pointing to the English vessel as he spoke, "they have fired the first shot!"

"Down with you, then, every one!"

"They are too far off to injure us."

"You don't know that. Down! down!"

The highwaymen crouched down, and the moment they did so, the sullen boom of a cannon reached their ears.

Tom had seen the wreath of white smoke, and had given the warning in time.

As it happened, it was not needed, for the ball fell far short of the mark. The shot was fired long before they were in range.

But it showed the enemy to be in earnest, and after a short interval another shot was fired.

This, like its predecessor, did not reach its mark, but it came nearer, and served to show how fast the enemy was gaining on them.

A deep silence reigned on board the French vessel. Everything which would serve to urge them through the water at the utmost speed had been done, and nothing remained but to wait patiently for events to take their course.

An anxious glance was occasionally cast up to the rigging, as the masts cracked or bent more than usual, but that was all.

Another shot was fired from their enemy, and this time it carried away some of the tackle at the stern.

It was easy to see that these were nothing more than trial shots.

As soon as they found they were fairly within range, they would have something more to expect.

Still the dusk came on, and one singular effect of it was by rendering the outline of the enemy's ship less distinct, it made it seem as though it had not gained upon them.

But this was a delusion, as the shots proved.

The excitement under which our friends laboured was most intense.

Were they, after all, to be overhauled when they had succeeded in escaping so far?

It would be most vexatious, after taking so much trouble and running so many risks.

But there was a strong probability of it.

They had long been aware of the superior powers of the English ship as a sailer, and now they saw she was larger and better appointed in every way.

By the aid of a glass, dense masses of men, all armed and ready for action, could be seen swarming her decks, and all apparently full of eagerness for the prospective contest to begin.

The French man-of-war was well manned and well provided with guns, though certainly in every respect inferior to the English one.

To be sure, a battle is at all times a rather uncertain thing; but anyone looking at the two vessels would declare in favour of the English winning the victory.

And now through the deepening gloom there came a vivid flash of light, followed by a roar like thunder, with which mingled the sound of broken woodwork.

The English ship had fired a broadside at her opponent.

It was aimed rather too high, however, for it whistled through the top part of the rigging without doing any very serious damage.

Then the highwaymen heard the French captain give orders to return the shot.

The order was obeyed instantaneously, for the men were all in readiness.

After this, the firing began to grow continuous and incessant.

The vessels came nearer and nearer to each other.

A thick smoke, too, enveloped them, and it was only occasionally that a glimpse of the enemy could be obtained.

The slaughter on board the French ship was terrible.

The cannon seemed all to be fired with a life-destroying aim, for while but comparative little injury was done to the ship itself, the men were cut down by scores.

Suddenly the mainmast was struck near its junction with the deck.

It trembled, and before it could recover itself, another ball buried itself close to its predecessor, and the tall mast, with all its intricate tackle in, the shape of rigging, sails, yards, and spars, fell bodily over the side into the sea.

The natural result of this was that the ship keeled over to that side in an alarming manner.

But men were at hand provided with hatchets, and by the aid of these the whole mass of cordage was cut away, and the ship, as soon as it was freed from this incubus, righted itself beautifully.

Their sailing powers were now, however, very much diminished; indeed, what little hope they might hitherto have had of outstripping their adversary was now destroyed—it was a matter of impossibility.

But it must not be supposed that the English ship had altogether escaped the effects of the encounter.

Her rigging had been seriously injured, and many of her crew killed or desperately wounded.

CHAPTER CCLXIII.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN, AFTER MANY PERILS, SUCCEEDED IN REACHING THE COAST OF FRANCE.

WHEN the three highwaymen saw the critical turn which affairs were taking, they, after a brief consultation, went below, in order to speak with the Young Pretender.

He had risen from his hammock, and was sitting in one of the cabins.

He looked very weak and ill, and there was upon his face that wearied, heart-broken expression, which was distressful in the extreme to see in one so young.

Now that the bright and glorious dream, with which he had from boyhood indulged himself, was swept away, he felt that he no longer cared to live.

In a few words our friends managed to make him thoroughly acquainted with the state of affairs above, and seeing the desponding state in which he was, endeavoured to rouse him from it.

To a partial extent they succeeded.

"And now," asked Tom, "it remains for us to devise some plan by which we can escape or avoid capture."

"Is there no chance of our obtaining a victory over our antagonist?"

"I fear none."

"Or, if there is," interrupted Claude Duval, "it is too slight for us to count upon it."

"Just so. The contest may be prolonged, but eventually I think there can be no doubt about the result."

"And what do you advise?"

"I can hardly tell what would be the best. On the water I am entirely out of my element. Had we been on land I should have known what to do at once."

"Are we far from France?"

"I have not the least idea, but it is a point which ought to be ascertained, so I will go up on deck at once and inquire."

It was Sixteen-String Jack who spoke, and as he uttered the words he left the cabin and made his way on to the deck again.

Darkness had now completely set in, and he had great difficulty in picking his way through the debris which strewed the deck.

At length, however, he was fortunate enough to find the captain, who was standing with his back against one of the masts, issuing orders to his men with unabated valour and resolution.

For a long time Jack found all efforts to speak in vain, but an opportunity presently occurring, he said—

"How far are we from the Coast of France?"

"The captain understood English, for it was in that language that Jack had asked the question, and he replied—

"I don't know."

"But you can give us some idea."

"I should think about thirty miles."

"No more?"

"It might be forty."

"That is enough."

The captain resumed his occupation of giving orders. "We are between thirty and forty miles from France," said Jack, as he re-entered the cabin.

"That is good news, then," said Tom King. "Some other vessel may come to our assistance."

"But that is a forlorn hope."

"Well, yes it is, and scarcely one to be relied on."

"By no means. We may be taken prisoners before then. I consider our great question is, 'How are we to escape?'"

"And leave the vessel to its fate?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! I don't know why not."

"Yes, let it be that," said the Young Pretender, looking eagerly at the idea.

"Desert the ship?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"That I leave to you."

"I will think of it."

"We can do no good here. Our aid will not ~~raise~~ the side of battle."

"True."

"Then let us seek safety in flight."

"But that is no easy matter."

"There is the boat."

"We might get in one and lower it over the side of the ship furthest from the enemy."

"To be sure we might."

"And then row off. We shall not be out of danger, but still I think we could manage a distance of thirty miles."

"Is that agreed upon?"

"It is."

"Come on deck, then, and get the boat in readiness. We shall see, too, how the battle is progressing."

The three highwaymen made their way on to the deck again, which presented about the same general appearance.

More of the dead and dying lay about than there did when they left it, and the deck itself was redder with blood.

A scene of the greatest slaughter and devastation met their view.

Yet the firing from both vessels continued with unabated fury.

The English had made more than one attempt to board them, but each one had failed.

Another effort was being made, however, just as our friends reached the deck, and every one was intently occupied in repelling it.

But grappling-irons had been thrown, and the vessels were firmly lashed to each other in many places.

Indeed, it seemed as though the crisis of the fight had come, and that a very little while would suffice to show who had the victory.

Seeing this, our friends hastened their preparations.

On the opposite side of the vessel they found three boats, and selecting the largest one, they lowered it into the water.

The sea was tolerably calm, though there was a good stiff breeze blowing. Still the boat would be able to carry itself in it, beyond a doubt.

Tom returned to the cabin to tell Charles Stuart all was ready.

He found him in the same dejected, melancholy attitude; but he aroused himself upon Tom King's approach, and said—

"Is all ready?"

"Quite."

"Come, then."

"There is, indeed no time to lose."

"Which has the advantage?"

"The English. They are superior in every respect, and have had it all along."

They reached the top of the ladder as they spoke, and the Young Pretender, as he cast a glance upon the field of battle, turned away with a shudder.

"This way," cried Tom King. "Quick—quick! or I fear, after all, we shall be too late."

The din of the battle was terrific.

Tom led the Young Pretender across the deck to where the boat awaited them.

Then with all speed they entered it, and cast off.

It was a four-oared boat, and the requisite number of oars to propel it had been placed in the bottom part.

One was taken by each, and they pushed off as rapidly as they could, being anxious in the darkness of the night to escape all possible observation.

They had every reason to believe that their departure was unnoticed.

And now, when they had drifted some distance from the vessel, our friends with one accord looked earnestly up into the sky, in order to ascertain, by an inspection of the stars, whereabouts they were, and what was the course they had to take.

They looked up for the north pole star, for they knew that when they had found it, if they kept their backs towards it, they must, in time, reach France.

It was Claude Duval who was the first to point out its position to his comrades.

The two ships, though lashed together, were by no means at anchor, but were sailing along with great speed; so the consequence was, that when the boat had been cut away they had swept rapidly away from them, and now the two vessels seemed miles off in the darkness.

Their situation was made quite palpable by the intensely bright flashes of light which shot from them.

It was the best policy of the fugitives, for such they might with propriety be designated, to keep as far away from the ships as they could, lest, after all, they should be captured.

Suddenly, however, their senses were assailed by a bright flash, immediately followed by a loud report.

An intense darkness succeeded—the two ships vanished from their view, and there was not so much trace left as a faint glimmer, to show where they had been.

"The powder magazine of one of them has exploded," said Tom King, "and all is over now. Perhaps both ships had been involved in a common destruction. If so, we had need be thankful that we are here."

They bent to their oars still more steadily as they spoke.

The three highwaymen rowed.

The Young Pretender sat at the tiller, keeping the little bark as well as he was able in its proper course.

Time passed on and our friends grew tired, still they were very loath to acknowledge the abatement of their strength.

No more reports or flashes came from any point of the horizon to indicate that the ships had renewed the conflict. Tom King was quite right, doubtless, when he said that all was over.

Beyond the vague piece of information which they had got from the captain, they had no idea whereabouts upon the wild waste of waters they were.

But by keeping as much as possible in a southerly direction they could not do wrong.

Still a long time might elapse before they reached the port.

The little boat, which looked like a nutshell upon the immense expanse, bounded bravely over the crests of the waves as she was urged forward by the rowers.

But little was said, for each one was busily occupied in looking for the dawn, which came at last.

Gradually over the whole surface of the sea there stole a faint and misty light, which made those in the boat look like spectres wearing the human form.

But the light brightened, and that effect departed.

Well pleased were the three highwaymen as they bent their backs to the oars to find that the dawn had come first in that portion of the sky which lay to their right hand.

Up to the present, then, they had been going in a right direction.

They had some assistance now from the wind, which blew a gentle breeze from the north, and made their passage over the waves much easier.

At last the sun showed his bright face above the horizon's verge. There were no dark clouds to dull the glory of his majesty, and his bright golden beams fell with a beautiful and sparkling effect upon the rippling ocean.

CHAPTER CCLXIV.

OUR FRIENDS MEET WITH MORE PERILS AND ADVENTURES ON THE DEEP, BUT AT LENGTH ARE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO REACH THE SHORE.

"No land in sight," said Tom King, with a sigh of disappointment, as he turned round and looked eagerly to seaward as soon as there was light enough. "No land in sight!"

"No," said his comrades, who had turned to look with him; "but we are holding on a proper course, and have done so, I think, from the commencement. Patience! patience!"

Tom King said no more, but again bent himself to his task.

All three, however, from having had the oars so long, were horribly fatigued; but it would never do to give in so soon, so neither said a word about it.

The Young Pretender was silent and moody.

And so more time passed.

The sun climbed up in the sky higher and higher, and began to make not only his light but his heat manifest.

From time to time our friends cast anxious glances behind them to the southward, in the hope of seeing land, but there were no more signs of it than at first.

This was terribly disheartening.

Yet they would not give way until Sixteen-String Jack spoke, who said in a voice of grave concern—

"I am very hungry. Who put any provisions in the boat?"

There was a silence for a moment, and then Tom King said—

"That was forgotten. We are without provisions, and without water too."

"Then I trust we shall soon reach land."

"And so do I, indeed, or else our case will be most desperate. In the hurry and bustle of our departure, I forgot all about food and water."

"So did I!" exclaimed the others.

"And even if I had remembered it, I should not have known where to look to find what I wanted; and a vain and bootless search would probably only have had the effect of hindering us until too late."

"True—true!"

"Our best plan is to think as little of our convenience as we can, and make all speed for land, from which, surely, we cannot be very far distant now."

"I see no signs of it as yet, Tom," said Claude Duval, as shipping his oar he stood upright in the boat, and looked long and keenly in a southerly direction, "I see no signs of it yet."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then we have no resource but to keep on as we have. Land must come in sight ere long."

"And soon I hope," said Jack, "for my arms and back are so stiff and tired, that I feel as though I could scarce draw another stroke."

"Mine are the same," said Claude Duval.

"Mine too," said Tom, "but it will never do to despair. Say, shall we rest awhile? One will be sufficient to keep the boat's head in its proper course, and we can drift with the tide."

His two comrades hesitated.

"You had better rest now," he added, "than when you are too fatigued to feel the benefit of it."

There was sound wisdom in this, and they felt it, so without another word they shipped their oars and rested, while Tom kept the boat's head as near due north as he was able.

Oh! how sweet was that rest! but as their bodies grew cooler, another want began to make itself apparent, an awful want.

It was thirst!

But not one mentioned it. Neither said a word respecting the fierce thirst which burned within him.

They looked all round them, but they seemed to be the only living creatures on the sea. They were far from easy in their minds. Some English vessel might come up and put out a boat to take them aboard, but this they determined, if possible, to prevent.

It was for about the space of one half-hour that they rested, taking in turns the duty of guiding their little vessel, and then they fell to their work again.

They did not know how long it was since they left the ship, but fancied it must have been eight or ten hours, and if they were correct in this they ought ere now to have had a glimpse of land.

But nothing whatever of the kind was visible.

And now the sun reached almost the highest point in the heavens to which he would attain, and as the heavens were free from clouds, the heat that he sent down upon the heads of our friends seemed absolutely scorching.

It materially increased their thirst. Their tongues were dried up and parched, and their lips cracked, but there was nothing wherewith to moisten them but the salt sea, to drink of which would be nothing but utter madness.

The Young Pretender, perhaps through the influence which the conduct of those by whom he was surrounded afforded him, bore his sufferings with a fortitude which elicited the warmest admiration.

And so the time passed on—passed on without bringing to their sight that which they so longed to see.

Not a word was spoken.

They found that to utter words dried their mouths and aggravated their thirst, therefore they wisely abstained from speech.

In this condition things remained until the sun declined—and declined—until his disk almost dipped beneath the horizon.

It was now quite clear that either the captain was very far out of his reckoning when he said they were only thirty or forty miles from the coast of France, or else our friends, in some incomprehensible manner or other, had been sailing in a wrong direction.

Which of these two it was it was impossible to say as yet.

The sun sank.

A cold wind seemed to sweep across the waters as soon as he disappeared, but the sudden chill which was felt by all, was to be attributed to the withdrawal of the light as much as anything.

Was another night of horrors to be passed through?

It seemed so.

The fair and beautiful daylight faded away.

One by one the stars came out, according to their different degrees of brightness, and they resumed their old mode of steering.

Rather anxiously they looked up to note the position of the north pole star.

They found it where they hoped to find it, and this set their minds tolerably well at rest that they had not come out of their course.

The captain, then, must have been in error about the distance.

It was impossible to say how far he was wrong. Perhaps they had still more than forty miles to go before they could touch land at its nearest point.

Should this be so, what were they to do for food and drink?

Already they thought the utmost limit of their endurance had been reached.

The cravings of hunger and thirst were really terrible.

A whole volume might be filled with the depiction of their sufferings.

To add, too, to their perplexities, the wind changed and began to blow fiercely from the north-east.

This increased their labour and made the task of keeping in their proper course a most difficult one. Each moment, too, the wind increased in violence, while clouds began rapidly to come up from the windward quarter.

Our friends marked these things with a feeling which might almost be called dismay.

They were no sailors, and quite inexperienced in nautical affairs.

Up came, too, the clouds with great swiftness and in prodigious quantities.

Very soon the whole face of the heavens was covered by them.

The stars were completely blotted out.

They had now no compass whatever to steer by.

The wind increased to a gale.

The waves swelled and rose to a great height, while their crests were tipped with a white foam, which glistened faintly through the darkness.

What were they to do now?

To hope to keep in their proper course, without some fixed object to guide them, was quite impossible, and, knowing it, did not even make the attempt.

Their whole attention, too, was demanded for the care of the boat, which every moment seemed in the most imminent danger of sinking.

They soon found they had but one chance of keeping her afloat, and that was to let her head be before the wind.

They scudded then before the wind with fearful speed.

Weak and exhausted, our friends threw their oars into the boat, and in a manner of speaking resigned themselves to that adverse fate which seemed to pursue them so malignantly.

Away, away they scudded with terrible velocity over the rapidly rolling foaming waves; but the little boat seemed strong and taut, and bounded freely on its way.

With anxious blood-shot eyes, throbbing pulses, burning brains, parched lips, and exhausted frames, the four inmates of the little boat endeavoured to pierce the obscurity around them.

But all was of one uniform blackness, and they could distinguish nothing.

That they were now going out of their course considerably, all felt certain. They might, perhaps, never come near the coast, but be drifted out to sea, and so be lost.

On board of a large ship the wind, that blew with so much force upon our friends, and seemed to them a hurricane, would but have been a breeze to waft them on their course.

At length the ears of Claude Duval heard a sound with which he was familiar.

It rose plainly above the wind.

"Breakers!" he shouted. "Breakers! we are near the land now with a vengeance!"

Looking in advance, they saw a white line of foam

The next moment they swept over it.

Fortunately at a lucky moment.

The boat was light, and they shipped one wave, but that was all.

They were now riding in comparatively smooth water.

The oars were resumed with a better spirit, and in a few minutes they felt the keel grate against the sand.

They were so exhausted and overcome that they could scarcely find strength to crawl out of the boat.

But at length they did so, and all four together made their way wearily towards a light which they saw in the far distance.

They had, indeed, reached France.

The Young Pretender quickly made himself known to the authorities, and then our friends had every attention paid to them which their condition demanded.

CHAPTER COLXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS FRIENDS RESOLVE TO RETURN ONCE MORE TO ENGLAND, AND COMMIT A HIGHWAY ROBBERY ON THE CALAIS ROAD.

THERE is, or rather there was, at the period of which we are writing, behind the convent of Carnes Deschaux, Paris, a piece of waste ground much used as a spot where duels might be fought, or meetings take place without much fear of an interruption.

Indeed, it had rather a bad reputation, that convent of Carnes Deschaux, which was a stone edifice, rapidly crumbling to decay.

It was one morning rather more than a week after the events which we described at the end of the preceding chapter, that four persons stood upon this piece of waste ground behind the convent to which we have alluded.

Had any one seen them they would at once have come to the conclusion that a duel was about to be fought, for all were well armed and had serious countenances.

The time, too, would have favoured that supposition, for it was early morning, and the huge city yet slumbered.

The early rays of the morning sun fell with a beautiful and picturesque effect upon the moss-grown crumbling walls of the convent, and upon the attire of the four persons.

They were old acquaintances of the reader.

One of them stood a little apart from the other three, who he was addressing in a rich, calm, but sad voice.

His words will be quite enough to explain all, and we need do no more than simply chronicle them.

"My friends, for such from the first you have proved yourselves to be, I have appointed to meet you at this place in order that we may have a little conversation with each other, which shall be heard by no one but ourselves."

The others bowed, and the speaker continued—

"I need hardly tell you that I am a disappointed man. The dream of ambition wherewith I have beguiled myself is utterly dispersed. I have made, in the face of the

most discouraging circumstances, an attempt to recover that which I cannot help considering my rightful inheritance. In that attempt you have aided me like brave men. But fortune was against us. The enterprise failed. Never mind. Let us bear no more of it. We have escaped from our enemies. Our lives are yet our own. But it was not to tell you that which you must know well already that I called you here. No. It was in a few words to say that I must retire into an obscurity from which I can never emerge. I am poor. I have no money. All the wealth we possessed was lavished upon this enterprise, and has been lost. It is, then, very unwillingly that I confess that I have nothing wherewith I can reward you but my thanks. Those you can have. Believe me, they are most cordial and sincere ones. You have done all that men could do, and who could accomplish more? But I wish you to understand me. In this obscurity to which I am about to consign myself, I shall have only my poverty for my companion. I must, therefore, part from you, for when I withdraw from the world there is no reason why you should withdraw with me. It grieves me exceedingly that I should have to part with you—to dismiss you from my service without rewarding you. But it cannot be avoided. To your companion I owe my present life and liberty. The daring scheme which he had the boldness to attempt to carry out, and of the success of which he spoke so confidently, he may perhaps, though it is somewhat doubtful, bring to a successful termination. Should he do so, I shall consider the reward offered by the English government for my dead body as lawful spoil. Therefore, when I leave you, I must beg of you to return to England and rejoin your comrade. Should he have been lucky enough to obtain the reward, it is my particular desire that it may be divided equally among you. You will then have, each of you, enough to live upon, and you will be able to quit that mode of life which is derogatory to you. Courage and honour. I shall never forget you, and the zeal you have displayed in my cause, and I shall be eternally grateful for it.

The Pretender paused.

Respect forbade either of the three highwaymen to interrupt him, so he spoke on to the end in the manner we have recorded.

But though we set down the words, we are wholly unable to represent the tone of deep pathos in which they were uttered.

"We shall ever remember you," said Tom King, at length; "and you do not yourself regret the failure of this enterprise more than we do. But it is past. And now, my prince, allow me to dissent from you. Let us stay here until we hear from England."

"No; I am firm. I have decided upon my course. If you respect me, as I believe and hope you do, show that respect by not prolonging this to me most painful scene, but bid me farewell, as I requested."

"If such is your wish, prince, we of course obey."

"It is my wish. Farewell! farewell! We shall meet no more. Let me give each of you some souvenir by which you can remember me. The gifts are simple; would that they were of greater wealth."

He took four rings from the fingers on his left hand as he spoke, and gave one to each of our three friends.

Then, holding up the fourth, he said—

"This is for your companion. I must beg of you, when you rejoin him, to place it upon his finger in my stead, and with my best wishes. Now, farewell! Do not prolong the parting. Farewell!"

The Young Pretender turned rapidly away as he spoke, and was quickly lost to sight round an angle of the building.

"And so this is the end," said Claude Duval, after a pause; "and we are free to return to England. Well, for my own part, I am glad of it."

"And so am I," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"I know you both joined the enterprise chiefly because Dick and I did so. Well, we have come to no great harm, as it so turns out, and there is a chance that we may come to some good, for I have great faith in Dick."

"So have I; and I should not wonder if, after all, he does not succeed in carrying off the reward."

"I trust he may, for the sake of us all; but I am afraid too many inquiries will be made, and too much delay will take place."

"Time will show."

"I am anxious to know. There is nothing to keep us here; and since we are free to do so, let us set off for England at once."

"With all my heart."

"Come on, then!"

"Stop a moment. How are we off for funds to prosecute our journey?"

"Badly."

"I thought so."

"But how are we to remedy that? In the old fashion?"

"Why not?"

"I see no reason why not."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"But where are horses and accoutrements to be found?"

"Yes, that is a serious question."

"Not very, either. We present a tolerably decent exterior."

"Thanks to the prince, yes."

"But what has that to do with getting horses?"

"Everything. We will go to a livery stables somewhere and hire three for a day."

"A day?"

"Yes, and stick to them."

"Rather dangerous. We should soon have them in pursuit of us."

"What does that matter?"

"Oh! not much."

"We are going to make our way straight out of France, only stopping to pick up money by the way. We shall be off before they can catch us."

"Well, we will try it."

Having resolved upon this plan of action, the three highwaymen immediately bent their steps to the city, and soon reached a place where horses were let out on hire.

Being so early in the morning, there was no one about but the ostler in charge of the cattle, and our friends immediately propitiated him by giving him a liberal gratuity—so liberal, indeed, that he jumped to the conclusion they were gentlemen.

It was no unusual thing for strangers to come there and hire horses for a time, so that our friends got what they wanted with even less trouble than they had anticipated.

They were quickly in the saddle, and trotted off down the street.

The ostler stood at the entrance of the stable-yard and looked after them, jingling the money he had received from them in his pocket.

He little thought that he was never fated to see those horses again.

The steeds of which our friends had got possession seemed of excellent quality, but desiring to attract as little attention as possible, they trotted gently along the streets until Paris was left behind them.

Upon gaining the open country, they increased their speed, and stopped at the next town to refresh the horses while they purchased pistols and ammunition, for they were wholly unprovided with those necessities.

They were easily obtained, though the people of whom they were purchased, finding them to be foreigners, charged them a most extortionate price.

Sixteen-String Jack, too, bought some cloth which he divided into three portions.

In these holes were cut to see through, and being placed upon their heads, and their hats used to keep them in their places, formed excellent masks.

Thus provided, they kept upon the road all the day, resting occasionally at quiet inns, so as not to knock the horses up too soon.

During daylight they offered no molestation to the persons they met upon the road, but when it grew dark they prepared for action.

A dispute then arose as to who should stop the next conveyance that looked worth the trouble.

All were anxious to have the honour.

Finding it could be agreed upon in no other way, they determined to draw lots for it.

The chance fell upon Claude Duval.

Scarcely had this little arrangement been made, than the rumbling of wheels upon the silent road came to their quick ears.

"Here goes," said Claude. "Keep back all of you, and do not interfere without you find my safety demands it."

He trotted forward towards the carriage, which was a huge affair drawn by two horses.

"*Halte là!*"* he shouted to the coachman, and in an agony of fright the driver pulled up in a moment.

"*Au secours!*"† he yelled at the top of his voice, but Claude discharged his pistol in the air, and the man fell to the ground as though dead.

The carriage window was let down at this moment, and a voice cried—

"*Voleurs de grand chemin. Au secours. Au secours.*"‡

Claude was at the window in a moment, and holding his pistol in a threatening attitude, commanded silence.

He saw the occupants of the carriage were well dressed, and male and female.

CHAPTER CCLXVI.

MR. JOSIAH SKINNER UNDERGOES A LITTLE DISCIPLINE AT THE PUMP, AND IS DESERVEDLY WHIPPED OFF THE WINBERRY ESTATE.

THE expression of Mr. Josiah Skinner's face when Dick Turpin stepped so unexpectedly from behind the screen was really a sight to see. It was a most absolute picture of ludicrous fright and horror.

He released his hold upon the mysterious lady instantly, and alarmed excessively at Dick's hostile appearance, sank in a collapsed condition in the chair which was nearest to him.

"Now, Mr. Skinner, if such is your name, be good enough to explain the meaning of your intrusion here, and when you have done that you will have to account to me for your behaviour to this lady here!"

"Oh! I shall, shall I?" asked Mr. Skinner, assuming a courage though he felt it not. "I shall, shall I."

"You will, and bear in mind I am not to be intimidated by you. What is the meaning of your intrusion here?"

"Here's my authority," said Mr. Skinner, slapping the letter he held in his hand in the most approved melodramatic fashion. "Here's my authority to enter this house and to take possession of the same."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, and elevated the document in his hand.

"Oh! indeed," said Dick. "That authorizes you to enter here, does it? We'll just see."

As he spoke, and before Mr. Skinner could have divined his intentions, Turpin snatched the paper out of his hand.

The attorney uttered a howl, and made an attempt to recover it, but Dick was not so easily taken by surprise.

He took a pistol from his coat pocket, and deliberately cocking it, he held it in the face of the man of law.

"Sit down," he cried, "and don't move, or so sure as this is a loaded pistol you are a dead man."

"A dead man! Oh! lor!" ejaculated Mr. Skinner, who had a mortal dread of firearms. "I'll sit down, sir; I'll sit down."

Dick opened the paper, and saw it was signed and sealed in a very imposing and legal manner; but as for the contents, they were a little beyond him, and, indeed, he made no attempt to interpret the mass of legal jargon.

"And so this is your authority, is it?"

"It is."

"And am I to understand that it is by virtue of this you act?"

"You are."

"And that if you had not this document you could not act."

"Certainly not, it would be informal."

"Ahem! Thank you. Now, Mr. Skinner, attorney-at-law, what do you think of that?"

As he asked this question, Dick Turpin rapidly and skillfully tore the paper to shreds, and then threw them in the lawyer's face.

"Murder! Murder!" he shouted, "Oh! murder!"

"Sit still and hold your row!" cried Dick, again presenting his pistol.

Mr. Skinner sank back.

"Now how can you act? Where's your authority?"

"Murder! murder! I have that paper, I legally take possession of this house and all that belongs to it, in the name of my client, to whom they have been assigned."

* Halt there

† Help

‡ Highwaymen! Help! help!

"Who is your client?"
 "Mr. Adrian Winberry."
 "Oh! you avow that?"
 "Avow it? Of course I do."
 "Very well. Where is he now?"
 "I decline to answer that question."
 "I daresay you do, but it is all one."
 "How all one?"
 "I know."
 "You know, do you?"
 "Yes I know."
 "And where is he, pray?"
 "In Newgate, committed to take his trial on a charge of murder."
 "Pho!—pho!"
 "Which he committed."
 "Eh!—eh! Committed? Take care what you say. You may have to prove your words."
 "I am quite ready to do so."
 "Eh! what?" ejaculated Mr. Skinner, a look of alarm overspreading his countenance. "Ready to prove that he committed the murder?"
 "Is what you have just attempted to do quite legal?"
 "Quite legal?" Of course it is. Why?"
 "Nothing. Only it is a good thing for you if it is. Now, why did you inquire so particularly whether there was anybody in this house besides the lady?"
 "That's my business."
 "It may be, but it looks to me as though you were doing something not exactly on the square. Now, suppose any one else had been in the house, should you have taken possession?"
 "I—ah—I—why—oh! yes—that is—no! Of course I should."
 "Very good, that is quite clear and satisfactory."
 "Of course it is."
 "As you very justly observe, of course it is. Now, Mr. Skinner, just listen to me."
 "I'll listen; but I am not going to be bullied, I can tell you that," exclaimed the lawyer, once more endeavouring to show a valorous front.
 "It seems quite clear to me that your authority for acting in the manner you have was never very good, and now you have no authority whatever. And now that we have settled that part of the business, just look here. You came like an unprincipled villain as you are, the agent or tool of a villain, an unprincipled villain. You thought to find this house in the possession of this lady, and intended to abate into it. But I am here to defeat your abominable schemes. I have told you that you should answer to me for your conduct, and so you shall."
 "Mercy, mercy! I assure you, sir, that it is quite right and legal—quite right and legal. Mercy!"
 "Silence!" said Dick, who had caught the unfortunate lawyer by the nape of his neck. "Silence! You shall not depart hence until you have received condign punishment."
 "What would you do with him?" asked the lady.
 "Leave him to me. The steward has gone to London. What other male domestics have you got in the house?"
 "The butler and the keeper."
 "Capital; they will do."
 "What for?"
 "Call them."
 The lady did so.
 The two men hastily obeyed the summons, for they found something unusual was taking place, and were on the alert accordingly.
 "You will please obey me," said Dick.
 The lady nodded her head assentingly.
 "What is it, sir?"
 "You see this man. He has offered an insult to the lady here, and has illegally tried to take possession of your master's property; and would, no doubt, have succeeded, had it not been for my presence."
 Mr. Winberry was much loved and respected by his servants, and they gave a bound forward, which terrified Mr. Skinner exceedingly.
 The intelligence of their master's death had not been imparted to them for several reasons.
 "Where is master?" they asked.
 "He is dead," said Dick.
 "Dead!" they exclaimed, horror-struck. "How?—when?—and where?"

"That you shall know presently, but not in the presence of this man. He has endeavoured, however, to despoil Miss Blanche of her father's possessions. Now, what does he deserve?"
 "Let me get at 'un," said the keeper, "and I'll show him what's what."
 "Murder!"
 "Stop a minute," said Dick; "have you got such a thing as a horsepond?"
 "Yes! yes!"
 "Duck him in it, then!"
 "I am afraid there is not water enough."
 "Oh!"
 The lawyer's countenance brightened.
 "But there is a beautiful pump."
 "A pump!"
 "Yes."
 "The very thing."
 "Oh! it is such a pump! It draws nearly two gallons at every stroke."
 "Excellent."
 "And then the water!"
 "What of the water?"
 "Why, it comes out a well that is I don't know how many yards deep!"
 "Yes—yes."
 "And I do believe it's colder than ice."
 "Capital! Show the way to the pump, and I'll bring the lawyer. We will have him under it for half an hour."
 "Bravo! Hurrah!" shouted the servants, in an ecstasy of delight.
 "Murder! murder!" yelled the lawyer, making frantic struggles to escape his impending fate. "Murder! murder!"
 But it was all in vain.
 The lawyer was but a diminutive, shrivelled-up specimen of humanity, and possessed of about as much strength as a cat.
 The grasp Dick had of him was a tight one, and he could no more wriggle himself out of it than he could fly.
 His struggles were, however, most desperate.
 He clung frantically to every object he came to in his way, movable or fixed.
 To prevent this confusion, Dick took hold of him with his other hand, and this time by the seat of his breeches.
 He shifted his hold from his neck to his coat-collar, and fairly carried him before him into the hall.
 He kicked, he writhed, he swore, but it was all to no use.
 Out of the back-door he went into the yard, and at length the pump was reached.
 Dick deposited him, breathless and exhausted, in the capacious trough beneath.
 "Now keep him there, my men," he said, "and I will use the pump."
 "All right, sir," said the servants, seizing the unfortunate Mr. Skinner, and compelling him most reluctantly to remain in his uncomfortable position.
 Dick went to the pump-handle.
 It was a massive affair, and of great length.
 He raised it, and brought it down with hearty goodwill.
 He was rewarded by seeing an immense gush of water follow the application, and certainly when the keeper said two gallons were thrown at every stroke, he did not much exaggerate.
 Mr. Skinner howled and screamed, but Dick was deaf to his cries.
 Up and down, up and down went the pump-handle, as fast as his muscles could make it, and he never paused until, utterly exhausted, he was unable to work it any longer.

CHAPTER CCLXVII.

DICK TUPPIN MAKES A STARTLING COMMUNICATION TO MR. JOHN KERANT.

MR. SKINNER was thoroughly exhausted, too.
 When the two men released him, he never offered to move, but lay like a limp piece of rag in the trough under the pump.
 The dressing he had had was a very severe one.

It was a cold winter's morning in the first place, and the air was quite frosty.

The water came from a very great depth, and was proportionably cold.

"What shall we do with him now, sir?"

"I think he has almost had enough."

"But he must not stop here."

"No, he must not. Run into the hall and fetch a horse-whip, and whip him off the estate."

The alacrity with which they ran off showed their extreme willingness to obey this order.

Indeed, they enjoyed the sport mightily.

Back they came, cracking the whips most formidably.

Still Mr. Skinner did not offer to stir.

The keeper, however, upon reaching the pump, gave his whip a "flick," as he called it, and the extreme point of the lash caught the lawyer on the tender part of his person.

Mr. Skinner had been in a state of partial insensibility up to that moment, but that roused him.

He uttered a most awful yell, and scrambled to his feet.

Crack—crack! went the two whips, as soon as he was fairly on his legs.

His natural impulse was to run, which he did with a speed that was really astonishing.

The two servants followed, answering his cries for mercy with loud peals of laughter.

Away they went, the lawyer quite blinded with the water which ran down out of his hair into his eyes, bounding on like some india-rubber ball.

The servants kept well up to him, and when he flagged, a stroke with the whip accelerated his speed in a manner wonderful to behold.

More than once he caught his foot against or fell over some obstruction, and on such occasions he really did not stop to pick himself up, but kept rolling on and on until he rolled on to his legs again.

Dick stood on the steps leading into the hall, from which elevated spot he had an excellent view of the chase for a long time.

The men literally obeyed the orders they had received. They whipped him off the grounds.

They got him at last to the high-road, but he was in a meadow, and to reach it he would have to surmount a very high and very thick hedge.

Away he went at it, never seeing what was in his course until he was close to it, and then he gave a frantic bound to get over.

But he fell short of the mark.

He alighted in the most prickly part of the hedge.

Here, to the intense delight of the servants, he struggled and fought like a madman, until at length he rolled into the dusty high-road in a most deplorable condition.

Unfortunately for him just as he reached this place, which he did with a bang sufficient to break every bone and knock all the wind out of his body, there came along a drove of boys who were on their way to the village to school.

Directly they saw him they set up a yell.

The lawyer heard it.

The pursuers were close behind, he thought.

Up he scrambled.

Bruised, covered with weals from the whip, soaking with water, oaked with dirt, and his clothes hanging about him in shreds, he looked just like an animated scarecrow.

The boys, astounded at the sight, pursued him along the road to the village, pelting him with stones as they went.

On reaching the houses, however, he saw the door of one standing open, and made a rush into it.

"Murder!" he yelled. "Call the police! Call the police! Murder, murder!"

It was into a little cottage that he rushed, and the woman who occupied it was busily engaged in scrubbing the floor on her hands and knees.

At this sudden intrusion her fears and alarm were so great that she put her head into the pail of water instead of the scrubbing-brush.

The neighbours soon came up, and among them, of course, the parish constable and beadle, who put an end to Mr. Skinner's persecutions.

But we have other and more important matters to attend to, and therefore direct the attention of the reader to the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

When he had watched Mr. Skinner until he could see him no longer, he turned into the hall again, and made his way to the room in which he had left the lady.

To his surprise he found her seated near the fire, and crying bitterly.

She looked up as she saw him enter, and, mastering her emotion, said, in a voice broken by sobs—

"Oh! what is to be the end of this? I am terrified to death. Where is Blanche? Oh! I shudder when I think what may be her fate."

"Calm yourself," said Dick. "Calm yourself, I beg. This violent agitation will do nothing but unnerve you. I pray you now be calm. There is no fresh danger."

The lady dried her tears and looked at Dick.

"I do not know what I should have done," she said, "had not chance thrown you in my way. Think of this morning."

"Yes, the rascally attorney has met with the treatment he so richly merited. He will keep his distance of this place for the future, I'll warrant."

"But what do you understand by his presence?"

"I think I can easily explain it."

"Pray do so."

"Adrian Winberry would send for this man in Newgate.

He would tell him that this charge against him is a device to keep him from an inheritance, and, to prove his words, would show him the deed which his brother signed. He would then employ this lawyer to abate, that is, to enter upon possession of these premises on his behalf, in order to prevent any one else doing so, for 'Possession,' as the proverb says, 'is nine points of the law.'"

"I see."

"Upon further thoughts, however, I am inclined to think that Adrian Winberry has taken this Mr. Skinner more into his confidence than I at first imagined, as some of his words prove. If so, then the punishment he has received is indeed most richly merited."

"It is a terrible affair."

"It is, indeed; but I trust I shall be able to set it right. But, hark! What is that? More visitors?"

At this moment there came a loud knocking at the front door.

"It is, perhaps, Shockley returned from London with Mr. John Kersey, the lawyer."

"Most likely. I had forgotten that."

The lady was right, for the steward soon appeared, ushering in the individual mentioned.

Mr. Kersey was a man of about fifty years of age.

His hair, what little there was upon his head, was quite white.

His face had a kind benevolent look, and this was most perceivable in his eyes.

But yet he was a man of acumen and intelligence.

Dick was favourably impressed with his appearance directly he saw him.

He felt that he was a man to be trusted.

"You have sent for me, miss," he said politely.

"Yes, sir, upon very serious business. I pray you be seated."

Shockley handed Mr. Kersey a chair, and then left the room.

"This gentleman," said the lady, indicating Turpin, "will make you acquainted with the nature of the business upon which we have summoned you for your assistance and advice."

The lawyer bowed, and assumed an attentive attitude.

Dick then related those facts with which the reader is already acquainted, and which it will be unnecessary for us to repeat.

We ought to observe that he most carefully concealed who he really was.

"This is a very serious business, indeed," said the lawyer. "My father used to say that Adrian would come to no good. I have seen the account of the murder, but never knew until this moment that my client William was the murdered man."

"Yet such is the case."

"And you saw this murder committed, you say?"

"I did."

"Then why did you not proclaim at once all you knew, and step forward boldly?"



[THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CLAUDE DUVAL AND THE GENDARME.]

"There are reasons."

"No matter, you must give your evidence. It will be indispensable."

"Stop a moment, sir!"

"For what?"

"I will tell you. I believe you are much attached to this family."

"I am."

"And you would do a great many things to benefit it."

"All in my power."

"Enough. Would you receive a communication in confidence, and keep it inviolably secret, provided that by so doing you perform an inestimable service to your clients?"

"I would, indeed. Try me! You can trust me."

"I think I can, sir. Well, then, the reason that I did not come forward is because I am inimical to the laws of this land."

"Inimical?"

"There is a reward offered for my apprehension."

The lawyer looked very grave.

"I have it in my power to save this family, to defeat the machinations of a villain. Will you listen to me? Will you receive, in solemn confidence, the communication I am about to make to you? Answer me, yes or no!"

"I will. I may have scruples, but the magnitude of what is at stake is enough to induce me to set them aside."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Now then, sir, for your communication."

"Prepare yourself for a surprise—an overwhelming surprise; and in the astonishment which my avowal will elicit, do not forget the terms under which I make it to you."

Mr. Kersey looked rather anxiously at Dick, as he replied—

"Begin, sir. I am ready."

"What I have to say will take but a moment to utter."

"What is it?"

"I AM DICK TURPIN, THE HIGHWAYMAN!"

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

MR. KERSEY RECOVERS FROM HIS ALARM, AND DRAWS HIS ATTENTION TO DICK TURPIN.

It is quite certain that no other announcement would have produced such a startling effect upon Mr. John Kersey as the one did which ended the last chapter.

He opened his mouth to its full extent, and drew his breath in strange, hurried gasps.

Had he been standing, he would, doubtless, in his astonishment, have started back several paces. As it was, he gave his chair an impulse backwards, and its legs grated as it moved over the polished floor.

Dick Turpin enjoyed the amazement of the lawyer excessively, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he controlled himself from laughing aloud.

Mr. Kersey's speech entirely deserted him.

His first shock of astonishment over, he endeavoured to say something, but the effort was a complete failure.

His lips moved, but no sound came forth from them.

His eyes glared.

"Come, come, Mr. Kersey," said Dick, at length, "do not look so much alarmed and astonished. There is no occasion for it, I assure you. But let me remind you of the conditions under which the avowal was made."

Mr. Kersey spoke at last.

"Do—do you really mean to say that you are the des—no, I mean the note—that is, cele?"

"If you mean am I really and truly Dick Turpin, the highwayman, I say yes."

"Oh!"

"Remember your promise."

"I will, but"—

"But what?"

"How came you here in this place, and how came this lady to know you?"

"I have already told you, Mr. Kersey, that, pursued by my foes, I took refuge in a deserted and reputed haunted house in Birdcage-walk, St. James's-park. While there, as I related to you at length, I heard the conversation which took place between the half-brothers, and witnessed the murder of the elder by the younger."

"Yes, I know all that."

"And do you clearly comprehend it?"

"Most clearly. It would be impossible to mistake it."

"I am glad that. You understand what I have since learned in London?"

"Fully."

"Then, Mr. Kersey, the reason we have sent for you is, we want to know our best course of action. Give us your advice as to the plan to be adopted to preserve these properties and recover Blanche, and how to punish the perfidious half-brother for his black-hearted villainy."

"It is a matter requiring much deliberation," said Mr. Kersey, "and the circumstances are altogether of so extraordinary a nature that I own myself completely at fault."

"I like you all the better for making that admission," said Turpin, bluntly, "but you must think how much more you would have been at fault had it not been for my presence here, and having accidentally witnessed what I have."

"True, and yet there lies the difficulty."

"In what way?"

"Ahem—well—a"—

"Speak plainly, Mr. Kersey. You need not be afraid of offending me by what you say. Pray speak plainly."

"Well, then, I will. You cannot very well walk into the witness-box, and give your evidence."

"No, that is the worst of it."

"I presume you would not care to do that?"

"Not if it could be avoided."

"Certainly not. But supposing that it could not be avoided?"

"Why, then," said Dick, in a tone calm but resolute, and which left no doubt of its sincerity behind, "then I should not scruple to step forward in the cause of justice, let the consequence to myself be what it might."

"Is this possible?" said Mr. Kersey, full of admiration.

"I fully mean what I say; but of course you will understand that I should do this not from choice, but from necessity."

"Naturally."

"The peril to myself would be doubtless great; but I should think the sacredness of my cause would shield me from capture."

Mr. Kersey shook his head.

"I don't know that," he said. "I am afraid not."

"No, no," said the lady, "I will not permit that. Some other means less dangerous to yourself must be found. I cannot consent that for our sakes you should peril your life, as you would do if you were to act in the manner you propose."

"Can any other means be found?" said Dick. "If so, then no one would be more glad to embrace them than myself, for I confess myself to be by no means tired of my existence, though in it there is little of happiness and enjoyment. However, that is neither here nor there."

"It is not."

"Mr. Kersey."

"Sir."

"You have been put into possession of all the facts of the case. You agree with me that it would be little short of madness for me to make my appearance in the witness-box."

"I do."

"But you also agree with me that it would never do to let Adrian Winberry escape the punishment which is his due for lack of sufficient evidence; nor would it do to let his nefarious scheme of taking possession of this place succeed."

"I cannot do otherwise than agree with you."

"I have been told, Mr. Kersey, that you are the solicitor to this family, and that your father had that situation before you. Such being the case, you cannot fail to feel a more than common interest in the welfare of its members."

"I cannot, sir."

"For myself, I hardly know why I feel the very great interest I do; probably I could find a cause for it in the strange manner I have been mixed up in it, and the detestation I feel for the monstrous villainy of Adrian Winberry."

"Just so, sir."

"Then, Mr. Kersey, I once more ask you to advise us. I am willing to do all, but yet I do not wish to expose myself unnecessarily."

"I think I may venture to say that I comprehend you perfectly in all that you have said. The worst of it is, we have so little time before us."

"You are right; the trial will take place to-morrow."

"I am aware of it. You see that leaves us with hardly any time before us."

"Well, Mr. Kersey, what is your advice?"

"I must really refrain from saying just at present. I wish I could advise you, but at this moment I am unable—that is to say, I do not see how anything could be proved against Adrian. To be sure, he might be convicted of the murder, but that is not all. No one saw him commit the crime, with the exception of yourself and his two accomplices. Now, if those two men—and from what I can hear, I think they are unscrupulous enough—if, I say, they choose to deny that Adrian had anything to do with the transaction, we shall be obliged to call upon you for your evidence."

"I see all that quite clearly. But would my evidence be received?"

"The question may be raised. Have you ever been convicted of any offence?"

"Once in my boyhood."

"That is a pity. What was its nature?"

"Nothing important. I was tried for deer-stealing, and at the time of my conviction, considerable doubts were raised whether I really was or was not guilty."

"And were you?"

"What?"

"Guilty?"

"That is almost beside the question, I think."

"So it is. But were you convicted?"

"I was."

"Then your guilt or innocence don't much matter. I don't think that will damage your evidence in any way."

"I am glad of that. And now there is one thing more."

"Name it."

"Could I not give my evidence by proxy?"

"No; certainly not."

Turpin was silent a moment. Then he added—

"But suppose it was stated to the court that there was an important witness in this case whose evidence would be sufficient to prove the guilt of the prisoner, but circumstances prevented that witness from standing before the court and delivering his testimony."

"Well, sir."

"Do you think in that case the court would be induced to throw the shield of its protection before this witness, and allow him to enter the witness-box and give his evidence, and after doing so, permit him to depart unmolested?"

"I cannot precisely answer that question. I do not know whether it would be in the power of any judge in this kingdom to do such an act."

"Well, then, suppose the reasons for the non-appearance of the witness which I just now uttered were given to the court, and that you produced a document signed by me, which contained a narrative of all that had taken place, do you think that document would be received as evidence?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"I am afraid not, and more especially in a case of murder."

"And so, you think, neither of the proposals which I have made practicable or feasible?"

"I could hardly go so far as to say they were, not but I am afraid that they are not."

Turpin looked disappointed, and a brief silence ensued, in which all those three who were present at this singular conference gave themselves up to deep and earnest thought.

Dick was the first to speak.

"But, Mr. Kersey, if you think that neither of my schemes will answer, there is no reason why they should not successively be tried."

"None whatever."

"Then by all means let them be tried. If they are successful, then so much the better. If they fail, we shall be none the worse off, and the last resource will still remain."

"Very true. But I should be sorry to see you driven to it, because your liberty, and necessarily your life, would most certainly be the forfeit. The judge would have no power to prevent your capture."

CHAPTER CCLXIX.

MR. KERSEY AND DICK TURPIN CAME TO A DEFINITE UNDERSTANDING.

DICK TURPIN'S lips were curled with a dissenting smile when Mr. Kersey said that his capture must of necessity follow his appearance in the witness-box; but, except by this smile, he did not in any way contradict what he said.

As to the latter part of his speech, that might have been, and doubtless was, correct.

"If the object so much wished for cannot be attained by any other means, I am willing to run the risk."

"But, my dear sir—"

"Mr. Kersey!"

"Listen to me!"

"Nay, sir; you listen to me."

"I will, since you wish it; but"—

"No buts. As you must already know, I am a man of rather an uncommon kind. I am one who never suffer danger to dismay him or turn him aside from the execution of any purpose upon which he had determined.

"That may be; but still I consider it to be the duty of every one to preserve himself."

"And so do I," said the lady, "and I will never consent to this sacrifice, for I can call it by no other name."

"It is a sacrifice," said Mr. Kersey, "and however much you may be admired for making it, or offering to make it, still I think it is one which ought not to be permitted."

"I am sure it ought not."

"I am in your hands," said Turpin, "and nothing is further from my wishes than to act contrary to your inclinations. I have merely made these proposals; and if anything else can be suggested, I shall be pleased, for

you must not think that I wish to expose myself for the mere sake of doing so."

"That is a very sensible speech," said Mr. Kersey. "It seems very strange, I can assure you, sir, for me to be sitting down in your society; and I can hardly bring myself to believe that I am awake or in my senses."

"I dare say it does seem strange, sir. I have trusted you. I have taken your word; I shall rely upon that as a guaranty that you will not betray me."

"I am offending against the law," said Mr. Kersey, with a smile. "I ought, if I did the strict letter of my duty, to denounce you with all speed possible to justice; but, then, circumstances alter cases."

"You are right, sir."

"You can trust me, then, and safely."

"I believe you. I came to the conclusion that I could do so as soon as I saw you. Your countenance is the countenance of a man who can be trusted."

"You flatter me."

"Not at all—not at all. And now, Mr. Kersey, should you like a few hours for reflection? If so, I am sure you can have it."

"Oh! yes, Mr. Kersey," said the young lady.

"No, no; I shall not require it. I should like to find some other means of bringing Adrian to punishment, but I am afraid I shall not be able. The trial coming on so quickly as it does, leaves us no time for deliberation, and very little for action. With your permission I will return to London and hold a consultation with one of my brethren."

"But, Mr. Kersey—"

"Rely upon my discretion. I will take care that you are not jeopardized in any way."

"I spoke for fear you should forget my peculiar position."

"I will recollect it. I shall have to instruct counsel; indeed, I shall not have a spare moment from now to the commencement of the trial."

"You will not, indeed."

"Both of you had better see me to-morrow morning, before the commencement of the trial."

"Very well, sir."

"And you," added Mr. Kersey, addressing himself more especially to Dick, "I should recommend you to employ all the time between now and then in writing down on paper all that has taken place, omitting no particular, no matter how trivial. We may have no want for such a document, but still it will be far the best to be prepared with it in case it should be required."

"I will sit down and do it immediately after your departure, and will make it as complete as I can. But there is one thing more before we part."

"What is that?"

"Where are we to meet in the morning?"

"At my house."

"Your private residence?"

"Yes."

"Where is it situated?"

"No. 7, Red Lion-square."

"I shall recollect: and what time shall we be there?"

"Not later than eight, I think."

"Oh! yes."

"Well, eight be it, then. And now, Mr. Kersey, it so happens that, being in my way a rather celebrated character, I am known by sight to many persons in London."

"I daresay."

"You will, then, I hope, see the necessity of having no prying domestics about."

"You can leave all that to me with perfect confidence," said Mr. Kersey. "At eight o'clock to-morrow morning I shall be at my front door waiting to receive you."

"I shall be there."

"With this I think all is quite arranged."

"I think so."

"Do you, lady?" asked Mr. Kersey, turning to the mysterious female, who had taken so little part in what had been going forward.

"I shall leave that for you two to decide, as I have said the other," she said. "I consider you are by far more competent to do it than I am."

"Well—well; but you will be at my house in the morning?"

"I will."

"That is enough. And now, could Blanche be found, all would go well. The overthrow of the villain *Adamo* will be complete; but I am afraid"—

"What—oh! what?"

"That, standing as she did in the way of his possessions, and likely as she would be to interfere with all his future projects, that he has disposed her somewhere in so safe a place that we shall have great trouble in finding her, if we ever succeed."

"I will find her," said Dick, "if she is upon the earth. I have previously determined to strain every nerve to do so."

"Then all I can say is, may you be successful. It is monstrous that a father should be ruthlessly murdered and a daughter abducted from her home."

"It is; but the crime shall not go unpunished."

"I am glad to hear you say as much, for I can tell you are a man who always carries out what he resolves upon. From this day I shall alter the opinion I had formed of you."

"Doubtless you believed I was all that is infamous and bad in human nature. If so, I rejoice at having the opportunity of showing you I am not."

"I am already satisfied; and now let me depart. You set about performing your part, and I will do the same."

The lawyer then exchanged farewells with the unknown lady and Dick Turpin.

Shockley, the steward, drove him back to town.

Soon after his departure, the lady had brought into the apartment where Turpin was sitting materials for writing, and left him to commence his task.

Now Turpin had received but a small amount of education. To be sure, he could read and sign his own name; but his accomplishments did not go much further than that.

When it came to writing down, and succinctly and deliberately writing all that had taken place, he found himself completely at fault, and he spoilt many sheets of paper in the attempt.

At length, after about an hour had been spent in this fruitless manner, the lady entered to see what progress he had made.

"I have undertaken what I cannot perform," he said, "without you will lend me your assistance."

"In what way can I assist you?"

"If it would not be too much trouble, I should like to tell you what occurred, and for you to write it down correctly."

"I shall have no objection," replied the lady; "indeed, I consider myself bound to do all I can in return for the services you have rendered me."

"Do not speak about that."

"I will not, since you do not wish it. But if I write this, you will have to read it over and sign it."

"So I am aware, and I can do that."

"Very well. Let us commence at once."

The lady sat down, and as Turpin spoke, put down upon paper one of the most extraordinary adventures he had ever met with in the whole of his career.

As Turpin entered into every detail, it of course occupied a great deal of time, and it was dusk before the lady's task was finished.

It is not necessary to give the contents of this document, because the reader is already acquainted with every detail which it contained.

When finished, however, the lady read it over aloud to Dick from the beginning to the end, and having pronounced it quite correct in every particular, the highwayman affixed his name to it.

The evening meal was then prepared, and Dick did full justice to it.

When over, he made his way to the stables, where his mare was placed, and as he had expected, found she had been treated with every care, and that, had he done it himself, she could not be more to his satisfaction than she was.

The groom was there, and Dick gave him a liberal present, for he considered the man fully deserved it.

Then, returning to the hall, he found the lady in the same apartment as that in which he had left her, but he could see that she was suffering greatly from fatigue.

At his request she retired to her apartment, for in the morning they would have to rise early to be in London at eight.

She was glad enough to yield to his request, and soon afterwards Shockley, the steward, entered, and showed Dick to a sleeping chamber where he could pass the night.

Dick was very weary and greatly in want of repose, and besides which, he wished to recuperate his energies as much as possible, to be in readiness for the ensuing day.

It must not be thought that Dick either underrated or was blind to the amount of danger he would incur.

CHAPTER CCLXX.

DICK TURPIN AND THE MYSTERIOUS LADY SET OUT FOR LONDON, AND REACH IN SAFETY THE LAWYER'S RESIDENCE IN RED LION-SQUARE.

LONG before daybreak Dick Turpin awoke.

The lamp, which he had left upon the dressing-table, was burning dimly.

A momentary confusion followed his awakening, for he was at a loss to think where he was.

That feeling, however, quickly vanished, and springing from his couch, he trimmed the lamp, and looked at the time.

It was just five.

Even as he looked there came a faint tapping at the door, and the voice of old Shockley, the steward, said—

"Rise, sir, please. Breakfast is ready, and we shall have to start to London soon."

Dick replied, and hastily apparelled himself.

He was one who, in a general way, bestowed but little trouble upon his personal appearance.

The present occasion, however, proved an exception to the general rule.

He took the utmost pains possible with his toilette, and as there was every convenience necessary to the purpose ready to his hand, he succeeded marvellously.

Still he did not consume much time over the process, but when he descended, the unknown lady was waiting for him to make his appearance.

The breakfast was soon despatched, and then they prepared for their journey.

The care of the equipage was given to Shockley, who, as before, acted as coachman.

Dick rode inside.

It was barely light, and bitterly cold when they started.

But as they travelled on, the dawn advanced with rapid strides, though the sun did not show his face above the horizon until they had almost reached London.

When he did break forth the light he gave was trifling, for his brilliancy was hidden by the fuliginous exhalations which hung upon the horizon.

The time passed quickly enough, for during the whole of it, from the time they started, the two strangely-assorted occupants of the carriage were busy in talking over the momentous events of the day.

Punctually at eight o'clock, the vehicle drew up before the residence of Mr. Kersey, in Red Lion-square.

According to the promise which he had made, the lawyer was standing upon his threshold waiting to receive them.

Shockley got down off the box—it was a plain travelling carriage—and opened the door.

Previous to his doing so, Dick had taken a cautious peep all round him, and, to his satisfaction, no one was in sight.

He alighted, therefore, with confidence, and, turning round, assisted his companion to alight also.

To cross the pavement and pass through the lawyer's door did not take a moment.

According to instructions which had been given him before starting, Shockley took the horses to livery-stables close by.

Mr. Kersey closed the door behind his strange guests without uttering a word, and then led them across the passage to a room which he had had fitted up like an office, and where he transacted a great deal of private business when he was at home.

To the intense surprise of Turpin, here was seated a gentleman, who rose from his seat as soon as they entered.

He was thin and pale, and seemed at first sight to be sadly deficient in physical energy, but that was far more in appearance than in reality.

A second glance would have shown that, though his frame was thin, yet it was wiry and muscular.

But his head was really remarkable.

Across his forehead, from temple to temple, it was an enormous width, and was circular in shape; but this width of forehead was in some measure taken off by the height, which was proportioned to it.

From this great width at the temples, his face tapered off like the two sides of a triangle, of which his chin formed the apex.

His eyes were small and deeply set.

The frontal bone projected over them to an unusual distance, and his cheek bones were high and prominent, so that the eyes seemed literally buried in two deep sockets.

But, nevertheless, despite the smallness of their size, and the peculiarity of their position, they were intensely bright and piercing.

They had in them always a particular sparkle when they were directed to anything.

The above outline—for description it cannot be called—imperfect as it is, will serve to give the reader some general idea of what kind of man it was with whom Dick so suddenly and unexpectedly found himself face to face.

He turned an inquiring glance towards Mr. Kersey, who shut the office-door, and said, indicating the singular-looking individual we have mentioned—

"This is Mr. Serjeant Nuttall, the gentlemen to whom is intrusted the case for the prosecution."

Dick bowed.

Mr. Kersey saw that the highwayman was not at ease, so he added—

"I have had a long conference with him, and placed him in possession of all the facts which you communicated to me yesterday. I have also entrusted him with the secret of who you are. But you need fear nothing. It was indispensable, and I obtained from him a promise that he would keep your secret, and do nothing whatever calculated to cause your capture."

Mr. Nuttall had risen when Dick entered the room, but it was more out of habit than politeness and respect that he did so.

He resumed his seat immediately, and fixed his sparkling eyes upon our hero's countenance, as though he would read him to the soul.

It was evident that he was not inclined to be very friendly.

The words that he first spoke, however, will serve better than anything else to indicate the state of his feelings.

"Mr. Turpin," he said, "what my learned brother has just stated is quite correct in every particular. I have given such a promise as he has mentioned, and I shall consider myself in honour bound to keep it; but I can assure you that nothing but the sacred cause of justice, and the desire I feel that the guilty should be punished, would have induced me either to give or make such a promise."

"I am content, sir, so that you do keep it. Of course, I desire to do this service, and preserve my liberty at the same time: though, as for your motives, they are not of the slightest consequence to me."

Mr. Nuttall was too old a practitioner to allow anything to disconcert him; and though he winced under Dick's words, and the half-contemptuous manner in which they were uttered, yet he did not permit the muscles of his face to indicate it in any way.

He spoke, and the tones of his voice were so calm and untroubled as it was possible for any human being to be under the least exciting circumstances.

"I can hold out no hope to you of retaining your liberty. If you come into court it will be entirely at your own risk; I shall be quite powerless to assist you in any way."

"I cannot help that, sir. I do not wish to expose myself, as you can readily believe; but I am resolved to do so should there be no other means of making the brains of Adrian Winberry apparent."

"Much as I may and do detest you in your general character," said Mr. Nuttall, "still, in this instance, your behaviour is so praiseworthy and noble that I almost forget who you are; and, indeed, it seems quite inconsistent and impossible for a highwayman to speak as you have just spoken, and announce his intention of acting in the manner you have just stated."

"I am glad that I have been the means of showing you

that a highwayman is not wholly and utterly bad—that he has his natural impulses as well as others, and perhaps as good a notion of honour as many of those who rank themselves above him."

"Come, come, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Kersey, "we ought not to go to work in this spirit, we ought not, indeed. Mr. Nuttall, pray bear in mind what Mr. Turpin is about to do; and let me ask you, where could you find any one who would have come forward and acted as he has offered, and I firmly believe intends to do."

"I cannot withhold my admiration of his conduct," said Mr. Nuttall; "it would be impossible to do so; and I shall feel heartily sorry if any harm comes to him."

"That is better. Now let us proceed. Have you the document written which I spoke to you about?"

"Yes; here it is."

"And does it contain all the particulars?"

"I think it contains them all."

"Let me see it," said Mr. Nuttall, extending his hand for the paper.

Mr. Kersey, who had taken the paper from Dick, placed it in Mr. Nuttall's, who opened it, and became immediately absorbed in its contents.

Mr. Kersey addressed Dick and the lady in a low tone of voice.

"Mr. Nuttall, here," he said, "is a very singular but clever man, and when I heard that the case for the prosecution had been confided to him, I brought him here and had a long conference with him, which, indeed, could scarcely be said to have ended when you arrived. He feels a more than common interest in the case, especially now I have put him in possession of so many facts of which he was previously in ignorance. But you must understand that his prejudices are all against you. When I first mentioned your name he ripped out dreadfully, but I partially calmed him, as you may see. That his feelings should be like this is nothing more than natural. All his life he has been occupied against such as you are."

"I quite understand all that."

"You may rest assured that you have nothing to fear from him; he will not betray you. On the contrary, I should not feel surprised if he does not warmly interest himself in your favour."

"And what course is going to be pursued at the trial?"

"That which you yourself proposed. Namely, that this document you have written be endeavored to be given in evidence instead of you; and if that does not succeed, for an application to be made to the court to shield you from the consequences of coming forward."

"Very good, sir; and should both these fail, you will, as I before told you, find me ready to come forward and give my evidence, taking whatever risk I may incur in doing so upon my own head."

CHAPTER CCLXXI.

DICK TURPIN IS MENACED WITH GREAT DANGER IN MR. KERSEY'S HOUSE IN RED LION-SQUARE.

DURING the brief silence which followed this speech, there came distinctly to the ears of all present the low murmuring of voices.

Dick Turpin, although the others heard the sounds as well as himself, was perhaps the only one who attributed them to their proper cause.

His face paled slightly, and he put his hand in his breast-pocket, as he strode towards the door of the apartment.

The two lawyers and the lady looked at him in surprise, and were about to speak, but Dick held up his hand with so expressive a gesture that they checked themselves and were silent immediately.

The murmuring sounds continued, and Turpin put his ear against the panel, but he could not make out what was said. The conversation was carried on in too low a tone of voice—

Finding this to be the case, he looked down and saw the key was sticking in the lock.

To turn it was the work of a moment, and then he crossed the room and beckoned Mr. Kersey towards him, who came at once, and so did Mr. Nuttall and the lady.

"Mr. Kersey," said Turpin, "who is in your hall talking?"

"I have no idea, but I will quickly see."

"Nay, stay! Who is there in the house that you have made acquainted with my secret?"

"No one but Mr. Nuttall here."

"Do you occupy this house yourself?"

"Yes, why?"

"Who have you in the house?"

"My wife and servants, and my private clerk."

"Private clerk?"

"Yes."

"And who is he?"

"A young man who attends to my private business."

"Does he know anything about my being here?"

"No. At least, not that I know of."

"You have not told him?"

"Certainly not."

"What sort of a young man is he?"

"Oh! ordinary kind."

"Do you think he might have found out who I am, and that I am here?"

"He might; but yet"—

"You may depend he has. The large reward which is offered for my apprehension has tempted him, and he has called in the police. Now if I am taken, not only will it seriously compromise you, but it will nullify my evidence. Besides which, I have made a resolution never to be taken prisoner, but to die with my sword in my right hand."

The face of the mysterious lady looked the picture of dismay when she heard the words Dick spoke.

But she had presence of mind enough to control any impulse which she might have felt to cry out.

She only gazed with clasped hands and half-open lips into his countenance.

But Dick himself was perfectly self-possessed.

"Do you think they are really officers in the passage?" asked Mr. Kersey.

"I have very little doubt about it."

"Then it is a most perplexing circumstance. What is to be done?"

"I should think the best thing would be to ascertain whether you are right in your suppositions," said Mr. Nuttall. "They might not be officers after all."

"But who would be likely to be carrying on a whispered conversation in your passage, Mr. Kersey?" asked Dick.

"No one."

"Very well, then. However, if they are officers they will quickly make their presence manifest."

There was another silence after this, during which all stretched their senses of hearing to the utmost.

About Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey there was a certain amount of excitement visible, which they could not conceal or subdue.

Dick had his eye upon the door.

Presently there was a faint sound.

Some one turned the handle cautiously, and tried to open it.

But they were unsuccessful, in consequence of Dick having had the prudence to turn the key in the lock.

The handle turned round in the opposite direction, and that attempt to enter the room was abandoned.

Dick exchanged glances with the two lawyers, as they perceived this surreptitious attempt to enter.

But he motioned to them to be silent, and watch further.

Some one now tapped lightly upon the panel.

"That's Francis," said Mr. Kersey, in a whisper.

"Who's Francis?"

"My clerk."

"How can you tell?"

"I know his knock."

"Oh!"

Tap—tap—tap!

"What does he want?"

"To come in."

"So he shall, and then we shall find out all about it."

Dick crossed the room as he spoke.

He gently and carefully turned back the key in the lock. Then he turned the handle.

The moment he felt that this was done.

The moment he felt he could draw the door open swiftly, he did so with his left hand.

His right hand he held in readiness, and as soon as the door was open he thrust it outwards like a tiger's claw, and caught hold of something

Then, with the same speed, having once got his grasp quite firm, he dragged this something into the room, and closing the door, locked it again.

So suddenly was all this done, that those who witnessed could scarcely believe their own eyes.

It seemed as though the door had been swiftly opened, and as swiftly closed, without an appreciable interval of time taking place between the two actions.

But, to their astonishment, the something which Dick had managed with so much adroitness to drag in, was a young man, who in a moment flopped down upon his knees in a supplicatory attitude.

"That's Francis!" said Mr. Kersey.

Dick did not pause, nor did he release his hold upon the trembling, abject wretch.

Ere he could open his mouth and cry for help, Dick thrust the barrel of a pistol into it, at the same time he dragged him to that portion of the room farthest from the door.

"Speak," he said, in a low whisper, but which sounded most alarmingly distinct in the ears of the lawyer's clerk. "Speak, and tell me all I ask, or I will blow your brains out this very moment!"

The clerk's teeth chattered against the barrel of the pistol, and he endeavoured to say, mercy!

"Silence!" said Dick again. "Now tell me, on pain of death, who is in the passage?"

He removed the pistol a little.

"No one, sir," moaned the clerk.

"No one! Be careful what you say. Who was whispering?"

"No one, sir. Oh! good sir, let me go! I'll declare there was no one whispering."

"You lie! We heard them."

"No! no! you are mistaken. You can look in the passage if you like; there is no one there; indeed there is not."

Certainly there was one thing which looked as though the clerk was speaking the truth.

No notice was taken of the attack which had been made upon him, and Dick argued in his mind that, had the officers been there, they would then have immediately made some demonstration of their presence.

But the stillness of the grave now reigned outside.

Dick was puzzled.

In the shifting glance of Francis, the lawyer's clerk, Dick could perceive an immense amount of duplicity and cunning.

He mistrusted him.

But it would be no good to remain in that state of uncertainty, so he resolved upon a bold and daring plan of clearing up his doubts.

He had never released his hold upon the collar of Francis's coat, and, uttering the most awful threats, he drew him across the room against the door.

The clerk's legs trembled beneath him.

His knees smote each other.

But not heeding him in the least degree, Dick unlocked the door and flung it wide open.

He had a pistol ready to his right hand, and he grasped it with the rapidity of lightning.

But to his unbounded astonishment, when the door was flung open, not a soul was to be seen in the passage beyond.

Dissatisfied, however, he dragged the clerk completely into the hall.

He was followed by the two lawyers and the lady, all of whom were much bewildered and alarmed at the strange events which were taking place.

But in the hall all was quite still. There were no traces whatever of the presence of anyone.

Dick's face assumed an expression of great uneasiness.

He was sure he had heard voices, and now where were the speakers?

He looked all around him, but nothing was to be seen.

He distrusted that calm however.

There was a mystery in it.

But what was its character?

It was important he should know, and that at once, for it would never do for him to be detained by anything, and his presence at the trial made impossible.

"Back into the office," he said. "We must have this affair well looked into before we go any further. Back into the office, I say."

He addressed these words to Francis, the clerk, who made a feeble resistance to accompany him.

The whole, then, once more entered the office.

There was a large arm-chair in which Mr. Kersey habitually sat, and into this Dick flung his prisoner.

He fell into a strange huddled up position, for he seemed as though what little animation he was blessed with had deserted him.

Once more Dick held his pistol threateningly before him.

Francis glared at it with a look that would have been rather difficult to interpret whether it was abject terror or assumed fright.

"Mr. Francis," said Dick, "your life hangs upon a thread. One touch with my finger, and you quit this world for ever! Of the two, I would rather not take your miserable life. It is not worth the having. Now tell me, at once, who was whispering at the door, and what the whispering meant? You won't answer? Well, then, I will count three distinctly, and as I pronounce the last word, if you do not speak, I will plaster that chair with your brains as sure as you now draw breath."

CHAPTER CCLXXII.

DICK TURPIN TRIUMPHS OVER FRANCIS AND MR. WRIGGLES.

A VERY peculiar, dusky-yellow kind of tint overspread the countenance of the lawyer's clerk, as Dick Turpin enunciated these menacing words.

"One!" said Dick.

The yellow tint deepened, but Francis did not speak.

"Two!"

His lips opened.

Dick put the pistol on full cock, and carefully examined the priming.

Then, finding all quite right, it could be seen by his resolute eye that he would say the word, and keep his promise, too.

"Mercy—mercy!" said Mr. Francis.

"It is useless to ask for such a thing, yet it is in your power to earn it. Confess all."

"I will—I will."

"Do so, then, at once. It is the only chance you have of saving your life. What was the meaning of the whispering in the passage?" Who was it?

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Speak! I say."

"I am—I am—I listened at the door."

"Go on! I suppose you heard my name mentioned, and thought you would like the reward?"

"Mercy!"

"Is that it?"

"Yes."

"And what did you do?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You can either do so or die."

"I will tell you, then. But you will promise not to take my life?"

"If you tell me, I will not."

"I called in the officers."

"Just as I thought."

"Ah?"

"Just as I thought."

"Did you think it?"

"Of course I did."

"Oh! mercy."

"No more of this delay. You called in the officers. What did you do next?"

"We came in the hall, and I told them you were in this room, but they would not come in. They would rather wait outside and take you as you came out, when you were not aware of it."

"Oh!"

"That's it."

"Is it?"

"I assure you it is."

"Then why did you tap at the door?"

"I wanted to come in."

"For what purpose?"

"To stay in here if I possibly could, in order to keep a sharp eye upon you. But it seems I am done."

"You certainly are. I wonder you had so little respect for your life as to attempt such a thing. You will yet live to repent of it!"

"You promised to spare my life."

"I have, and I will do so."

"Thanks—thanks. Let me go now, I beg of you."

"No, sit still. If I made the promise I did, I did not intend for you to get off scot free—neither shall I."

Francis uttered a hideous groan.

"Silence!" cried Dick, who was fearful the sound would reach the ears of the officers, for he did not know where they were hiding; "silence, on your life! Tell me this moment, in a whisper, whereabouts the officers have concealed themselves."

"Just outside, in the doorway."

"Oh! the front doorway?"

"Yes."

"And how many of them are there?"

"Four; but they have sent off for more."

"Oh! have they?"

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Kersey, for the little episode between Dick and Francis had happened so quietly, that neither of the spectators were able to interfere or interrupt. "What is to be done? Time is speeding fast. We ought to be at the Old Bailey now."

"We ought indeed," said Mr. Nuttall. "But how in the world are you going to get there?"

"Leave that to me," said Dick. "You start, and never mind me. Yet stay. A thought strikes me."

"What is it?"

"Come here, Mr. Kersey, and I will whisper to you, and you can communicate it to the rest."

Francis's curiosity was roused to its utmost pitch, but he could not hear what the highwayman said, though he strained his ears to the utmost.

Whatever it was Dick said, met with Mr. Kersey's approval, for he smiled and nodded, and then drew the two others aside to relate it to them.

"He proposes," he said, "to get a long cloak, and, enveloping Francis in it, take us out with him. This he calculates will deceive the officers. Seeing some one muffled in a cloak, they will make sure it is the man they want, and will pounce upon him. Turpin himself will be prepared, and take advantage of that moment to leave the house by another door which opens into a court, and he will then make all speed to the Old Bailey."

"It is a hazardous scheme," said Mr. Nuttall; "and I fear, through your clerk's meddling, we shall get into some bother, and be compromised in this highwayman's affairs."

"It cannot be helped now. As for the scheme, it will answer, I am confident. I will go and fetch the cloak."

Mr. Kersey left the office and quickly returned, bringing with him not only a long horseman's cloak, but a felt hat also, of a very similar description to that worn by Turpin.

Under threats of his life, Francis was compelled to rise from the chair, and wrap himself in the folds of the cloak, and to put the hat on his head.

He seemed to have a good deal of fear of Mr. Kersey, his master; but that was doubtless, in a great measure, the effect of habit.

As soon as he was equipped, Mr. Kersey spoke to him in a very stern tone of voice, and took his arm beneath his own.

He led him to the front door.

Then he drew aside, to allow Mr. Nuttall and the lady to pass him, he judging it would be best that he and Francis should come out last.

The position of the private door was pointed out to Turpin, and he stood at it in readiness to depart as soon as the officers made their capture.

As for Francis, he was getting bewildered. He could not comprehend what was about to take place.

All being quite ready, Mr. Nuttall unfastened the front door, and opening it, walked out with the lady leaning on his arm.

His eyes glanced all round, and he saw the faint shadow of the men.

But he did not look, for fear of arousing their suspicions. Mr. Kersey and his clerk followed closely.

No sooner, however, did they appear, than a number of men—eight at least—started forward, and laid their hands upon the latter.

One, who was very stout and had a purple-looking face, cried out exultingly—

"Hurrah—hurrah! Caught at last! I knew it would come to this. Caught at last! Hurrah!—ah!"

The last ah! was anything but a cry of exultation.

The clock fell from the person of the lawyer's clerk.

The hat was knocked from his head.

Then the recognition was instantaneous.

"Done!"

"Help! help shrieked Francis. "Let me go! help! help!"

Mr. Wiggles—for that was the name of the officer with the purple face—caught hold of Mr. Kersey by the sleeve of his coat.

"Stop, sir!" he said. "Stop!"

"What for?"

"There's some mistake."

"Mistake! what do you mean? Release me, sir!"

"Shant! I am a police-officer."

Mr. Wiggles flourished his staff, with the little gilt crown on the top of it, as he spoke.

"And I am a solicitor," said Mr. Kersey; "so I should advise you to be careful what you are doing."

Mr. Wiggles drew back a little on receipt of this announcement, but he said, rather fiercely—

"I have received information, sir, that the notorious Dick Turpin was in your house—Dick Turpin, the highwayman, and that he would come out with you, sir."

"Don't be violent!"

"I am violent."

"I see you are. But your information must be wrong. Do you think it likely that Dick Turpin would be in my house, and that I should walk out of it with him having hold of my arm? Absurd! absurd!"

Mr. Wiggles released his grasp, and glared in the lawyer's face.

It did seem absurd.

"Some one has been playing you a hoax," continued Mr. Kersey; "that is my clerk, Francis."

"Yes," said one of the officers, "and it was he who told me that Turpin was in the house, and would come out with you."

"Then he must have been amusing himself at your expense."

This idea took root immediately, and the officers were, in their wrath, about to make a unanimous attack upon Francis, when that individual cried—

"It's all right! What I told you is all right! They have only brought me out here to play you a trick. They found it out, and Dick Turpin is in the house now! I have seen him myself!"

No sooner did the police receive this intimation than they rushed simultaneously into the house, with Francis at their heels.

Mr. Kersey smiled, and so did Mr. Nuttall and the lady.

The ruse had succeeded to admiration, and by this time Dick was doubtless far on his way to his destination, and quite out of the reach of all pursuit.

Just at this moment, in accordance with Mr. Kersey's orders, a carriage drove up to the kerb-stone.

All three then seated themselves in it, and the order was given to drive to the Old Bailey with all speed.

The house was left to the officers.

With great expertness, they searched the house from top to bottom, and then they came to the private door.

Francis assured them that it was rough that which Dick had made his escape.

But in the court not a soul was in sight, and Mr. Wiggles was so convinced of the futility of getting up a pursuit against him that he did not even attempt it.

He uttered some curses, though, in a very diabolical tone of voice, while his face changed from purple to black, as he thought how neatly he had been done.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN IS RECOGNISED AT THE CORNER OF RED LION-STREET, AND HAS TO FLY THROUGH THE STREETS FOR HIS LIFE.

If Dick Turpin had been aware that it was his old enemy Mr. Wiggles he was about to defeat, his glee and satisfaction would have been much greater than they were,

Of all the rest of the Bow-street officers he had made himself conspicuous for attempting the capture of the "doubtable highwayman."

Every attempt which he has hitherto made has, as the reader well knows, signally failed; but whether this is a state of things that will always continue is more than we can tell at present.

Certain it is that, after every defeat, which he experienced, Mr. Wiggles grew more and more exasperated, and more determined to devote his whole energies to bringing the daring offender to justice.

We shall see what success his future exertions met with.

When the officer caught hold of Francis, Dick flung open the private door leading into the court and darted out. He had previously possessed himself of the key of it, and now he thrust it into the lock on the outer side, and tried to turn it in the lock.

But, some how or other, whether from long disuse or some other cause, the wards would not act, and he could not shoot the bolt; so, fearing to lose any more time, he left it as it was, and ran down the court at the top of his speed.

The court wound round about in a rather intricate manner, but in all its windings Dick took good care to preserve the proper direction.

At length he emerged at the lower end of Red Lion-street, close to its junction with Holborn.

He paused here a moment, and resolved to hail a hackney-coach, which would take him all the more quickly and safely to his destination.

But at this moment a man lounged past him.

The circumstance was a trivial one.

But this man—who was a kind of hanger-on, or supernumerary police-officer, at Bow-street—no sooner caught a glimpse of Turpin than he uttered a cry which had the effect of arresting the attention of everybody who happened to be within a hundred yards of where he stood.

At the same time he made a dart forward and endeavoured to clutch Dick by the throat, but the highwayman was too quick for him.

Doubling his fist, he struck the man a blow with the whole strength of his arm.

It lighted on the man's forehead exactly between his two eyes.

He fell down as though shot.

But many people had witnessed this, and Dick found himself almost surrounded.

No one, however, seemed to exactly understand what was amiss, and Turpin was elbowing his way through the crowd, and was in a fair way of getting off.

But, unfortunately, it so happened that a police-officer, who had been drinking at the bar of a public-house at the corner, came out to see what was the cause of the tumult.

He knew Dick and the prostrate man at a glance, and at once guessed what had occurred.

"Stop thief!" he cried, in stentorian tones. "Stop thief! Dick Turpin, the highwayman! A thousand pounds reward, dead or alive! Stop thief! Stop thief! Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Whoever catches him has the reward!"

A roar came from the populace as they heard these words.

An instant and universal desire to possess the reward flamed up in the hearts of every one.

They dashed forward in pursuit of the highwayman.

But Turpin never for a moment lost his presence of mind.

When he saw what occurred he knew what would be the consequence.

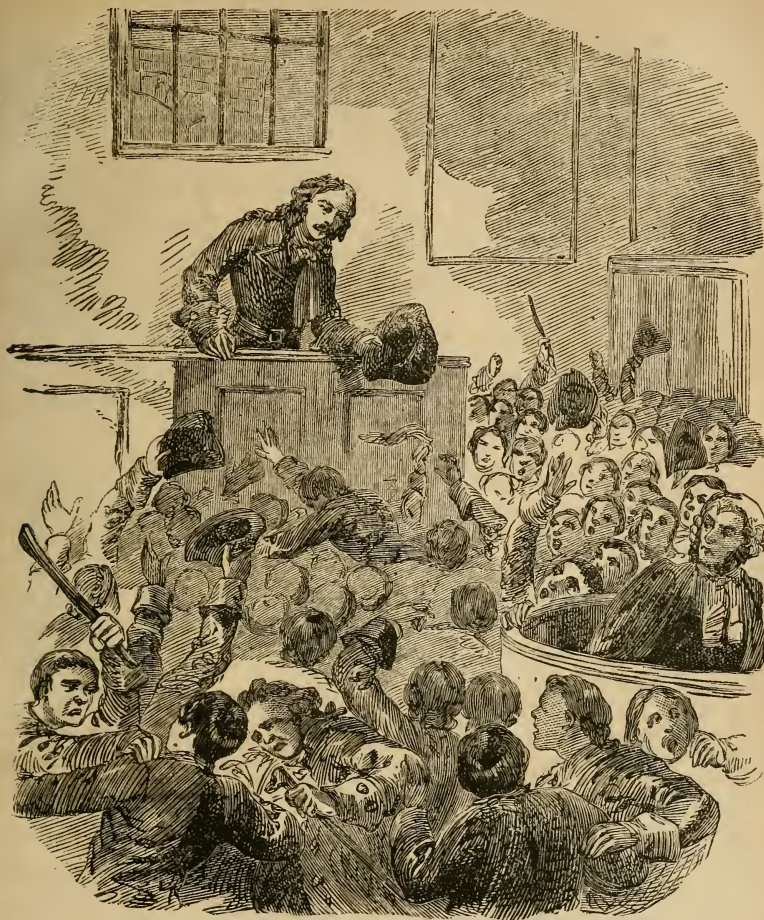
With one effort of strength he broke away from those who held him, and ran up the street ere the officer had finished his vociferations.

But the concourse of people, hooting, yelling, shouting, and screaming, were quickly after him.

Every moment, too, saw fresh persons joining in the chase.

It was up Red Lion-street, in the direction of the open country, that Dick ran.

To have turned down Holborn would, he knew well enough, be nothing short of absolute madness, for, in so crowded a thoroughfare, it would not have been possible for him to go at any speed, besides which, there would have been all the greater risk of capturing him.



[DICK TURPIN MAKES HIS APPEARANCE IN THE WITNESS-BOX AT THE OLD BAILEY.]

Accordingly, we say, he made his way up Red Lion-street to escape from his foes.

But from the courts and alleys that branched off from this thoroughfare the people came in shoals.

Dick had got a good start, and being a swift runner he was able to maintain it.

Just as he reached the corner of Guildford-street he saw what he had first looked for.

A hackney-coach.

It was empty.

Turpin dived his hand into his trousers-pocket.

He drew forth two guineas.

He held them aloft in the air.

The driver saw them, and stopped.

"Two guineas for your fare," said Dick. "Be quick! Two guineas. Drive round the next two corners like the devil, and they are used."

"All right, sir."

Dick gave the man the coins.

Then opening the door, he sprang into the coach.

The jarvey—as the drivers of hackney carriages were generally called—stimulated by the large sum of money which had been given him, whipped his horse, and made them go at a speed that no one to have looked at them would have thought them capable of.

A hundred people at least saw Dick get into the coach, and they hastened forward to intercept him.

But they were too late.

The coach rolled before them and turned a corner.

For a moment it was out of their sight.

But they soon had it in view again, but only to lose it round a second turning.

When he was out of sight of his pursuers, Dick projected his head from the carriage window, and cried—

"Round the next corner on your right, and then keep on. Don't stop. I will get out and shut the door. You will be caught, I daresay, and they will find no one inside, you know."

"All right, your honour! Lor' bless you! it ain't the

first time I've done this trick for gents in distress. Out with you, and I am off like a shot!"

Dick was pleased to find that the driver so well understood what he meant, and was so willing to aid him.

He unfastened the coach door, and let it swing open on its hinges.

He looked behind him.

His pursuers were out of sight.

The entrance to a court was just before him.

Such a favourable opportunity might not occur again.

He sprang instantly off the step into the roadway, and ran for a moment by the side of the coach while he refastened the door.

The clumsy vehicle lumbered on down the street, which was a long, straight one, and quite empty, so that it formed a very conspicuous object.

Dick in one more moment was within the mouth of the court.

It was a narrow, dark archway, and he felt that he should be almost well enough concealed if he remained just where he was.

Besides, he wanted to see the sport.

A minute elapsed.

Then there came upon his ears the roaring of a vast multitude.

His pursuers had much increased in numbers, and were close upon his track.

They rushed into the long, empty street.

In the distance they could see the object of their pursuit.

The coach.

Another roar came from their lips, and then yelling, shrieking, swearing, fighting, they kept their eyes upon it, and tore along at full speed.

There was a rush, and then the mob passed by the archway in which Turpin was concealed.

He pressed himself as close to the wall as he could when they swept by.

But he need not have troubled himself.

Had he stood in the street, they would scarcely have noticed him, so intently were their eyes fixed upon the coach, inside of which they felt sure he was, for had they not seen him enter it with their own eyes?

When the last stragglers who brought up the rear of the main body who went by had passed, Dick ventured to look out from his place of concealment.

The mistake had not been discovered.

The mob still held on to the pursuit of the coach, which baffled all their attempts to catch it.

Dick stood for a moment reflectively.

He hardly knew what to do.

He leant rather heavily against the wall.

He was breathless and exhausted, for the short ride he had had in the coach had not enabled him to recover from the immense exertions which he had made.

He took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, which stood there in huge drops.

Drawing his breath rapidly and painfully, he half-muttered—

"Curses on this accident, which has produced so much delay. After all, now, I may be too late, or, what is quite as bad, the court may be so crowded that I shall find it impossible to enter. What shall I do? Perhaps the whole affair may have got wind, and, if so, I shall find plenty of officers outside the prison waiting to pounce upon me the moment I make my appearance."

This was a very likely supposition.

How much the clerk Francis overheard, was more than he could tell, but most probably he knew all.

"Never mind," said Dick. "I have sworn to appear in the witness-box if events should make it necessary, and I will do so if a thousand officers bar the way, or if my immediate capture is the result."

With this resolution firmly fixed upon his mind, Dick looked about him, in order to ascertain the direction he ought to take, and then made his way at a rapid pace to Newgate.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

RETURNS TO TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES HOW THEY WERE PURSUED BY THE GENDARMES.

In order that the remarkable events which are about to

be related should be properly understood, it will be necessary to leave Dick Turpin in his perilous position for a little while, during which time we must turn our attention to the proceedings of his three intimate acquaintances, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

We have said that Claude Duval, upon looking into the interior of the carriage, saw that its inmates were male and female.

His acquaintance with the French language was but slight; still, from having occasionally resided in that country, he had become familiar with those expressions in colloquial use.

Consequently his orders for silence, uttered as they were in a deep, stern tone of voice, met with immediate attention.

The female occupant of the carriage, and who fell back into a half-fainting attitude, was a woman about fifty years of age.

She was thin even to scragginess, and her pretensions to beauty rested upon a very slight foundation.

On the opposite seat was a man about a match for her in age, but not in slenderness, for he inclined rather to corpulency.

We will translate what took place.

"Be silent!" cried Claude, in French. "Offer no resistance. Hand over as quickly as possible all the valuables you carry about you, and you will avoid all further ill-usage, and be allowed to continue your journey without interruption."

The gentleman—for such by his dress he appeared to be—to whom these words were addressed, made no other response to Claude's speech than to utter, with extreme volubility, some very diabolical French oaths.

But Claude put an end to them before the old Frenchman had exhausted his vocabulary, which seemed to be unusually copious, by thrusting his arm into the carriage, and placing the muzzle of the pistol against his forehead.

"Quick!" he said. "Quick! I cannot afford to waste time like this listening to your foolish words. Quick! I say, or you will repent it. Hand out your purse, watch, rings, and what other valuables you may carry about with you."

The old Frenchman very unwillingly put his hand into his pocket, and withdrew a purse.

With still greater unwillingness he handed it to Claude, who transferred it to his own pocket with a dexterity which could only have been acquired by long practice.

"Now your other valuables," he said. "You carry a very fine ring on your finger, I see. Pass it this way."

The old Frenchman looked wistfully at the article which Claude had mentioned.

It was a diamond ring, and a glance was enough to show that it was worth a considerable sum.

Just, however, as Claude was about to take it, he was startled by the rapid trampling of horses' hoofs in his rear.

Still he did not allow that to disconcert him, but took hold of the ring.

At the same moment, however, he heard Sixteen-String Jack cry at the top of his voice—

"Fly, Claude—fly! Do not wait on any account. There is a party of armed men behind us, and I believe they are gendarmes. At all events, they are armed, and doubtless in pursuit of us. Fly at once!"

Even as Sixteen-String Jack spoke, he and Tom King swept past the carriage at a rapid gallop.

The old Frenchman appeared to be well acquainted with the English tongue, for he gave vent to a cry of exultation when he heard what Sixteen-String Jack said.

Claude, however, took no notice of it.

He judged, by the actions of his comrades, that the danger must be imminent.

Therefore he turned his horse's head away from the carriage-window, and gave it a sharp impulse forward.

He was by the side of his companions instantly.

Glancing behind him, he saw the glitter of accoutrements, and heard the loud trampling of many horses' hoofs.

A momentary halt of the whole body took place, however, when they reached the carriage, and our friends took all the advantage of that moment which they possibly could.

The road was rough and uneven, so that to travel over it with any great speed was to run a great amount of risk.

That danger, however, great as it was, under the present aspect of affairs, was a minor one, and the highwaymen thought but little of it.

It would seem that the gendarmes stopped at the carriage only just long enough to ascertain what had taken place, and then they set off again at full speed, which showed clearly enough that our friends were the objects of their pursuit.

And now a word is necessary to explain how it was that they had approached so closely without Tom and Jack giving the alarm.

While Claude rode forward to attack the carriage, they, as we have already stated, kept in the rear.

They had just passed a rather broad cross-country road, which intersected the highway which they were travelling, but no more than a passing glance was bestowed upon it.

The fact was, however, that this, though not very much frequented, on account of its evil reputation, was a much nearer way from Paris than that by which they had come, so that, had they taken it, they would have reached the spot upon which they now stood a considerable time earlier.

Down this lane, however, there came a party of gendarmes, or military police, who had been dispatched in pursuit of our friends.

In consequence of their taking this route, and as the miry state of the lane necessitated their going at a slow pace, they were actually upon the highway before they had the slightest idea that enemies were so near.

Upon perceiving it, they, as we have seen, lost no time in giving the alarm to Claude, and bidding him to fly without delay.

Their horses began ere long, they found, to evince the most unequivocal symptoms of exhaustion.

But upon each occasion the poor beasts received a sharp application of the spur, which stimulated to a great extent their failing powers.

They proved themselves nevertheless to be steeds of an excellent quality, and our friends were in nowise deceived in the estimate they had formed of them.

This rapid pursuit was a thing which they had not counted upon.

In a long race a little start is a great matter, and so the present occasion proved.

Of course, from the first our friends had had the advantage, though certainly it was not much.

They gained again when their pursuers halted at the carriage—though that halt was about as brief a one as well could be.

In addition to this, they were not so heavily mounted as the gendarmes.

Having all these things in their favour, it is scarcely anything to surprised at that they should keep well ahead of them.

The rate at which they were going had the effect of quite taking their breath away from them, so that no conversation passed between them.

Besides, the whole attention of each one was centred on his steed.

Unfortunately, so far as their chances of getting away were concerned, there was a peculiar white misty sort of light, which made distant objects easily perceivable; but, had it not been for this, it is scarcely probable they would have gone so far without meeting with an accident of some kind.

This idea occurred to Tom King, and even as it was passing through his brain, his horse, from some cause or other, stumbled, and fell heavily to the ground.

Of course, the rider went down too, but Tom was so accomplished a horseman that, quickly and suddenly as the whole affair had occurred, he had had time to disengage his feet from the stirrups.

The consequence was that personally he received little or no injury, but the accident was a most serious one.

The horse, from the time it tumbled, made not the slightest effort to stir. It had, in fact, all the appearance of being thoroughly overpowered.

Had not this been the case, it might have recovered its footing, but, once down, it did not seem to have the strength to make an attempt to rise.

The other two highwaymen, upon perceiving what had occurred, reined in their own steeds as quickly as they possibly could, and turned the whole of their attention to succouring their comrade.

But Tom was on his feet before they had time to do than reach the spot where his horse lay.

"The horse is quite done for," said Tom King. "It is hopeless to think of getting him up again."

"What are we to do, then? In a few minutes the gendarmes will be upon us."

"I know it, and a hand to hand conflict would not suit us. Claude, you have the strongest horse. Let me mount behind you."

"Agreed. But be quick about it. The gendarmes have gained upon us tremendously, and, whatever slight advantage we may have gained by our furious galloping, we have lost again."

Tom did not need telling to make haste. He knew the peril of their position, and was aware of the imminency of their danger quite as much as his comrades were.

He was on the back of Claude's horse in a moment, and in this manner they resumed their flight.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, came the sounds of the pursuing gendarmes behind them, and each beat appeared to sound louder than its predecessor.

The tired horses, under the repeated application of the spur which they received, kept up wonderfully, though now and then a dangerous stagger would show how much their strength was spent.

The double burden which it carried soon began to make a difference to Claude's horse, so that, after a few miles, they were compelled to halt again, while Tom King dismounted, and took his seat behind Sixteen-String Jack.

CHAPTER CCLXXV.

IN WHICH CLAUDE DUVAL HAS A SWORD COMBAT WITH THE GENDARME, AND THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SEEK REFUGE IN THE RUINED MILL.

THIS, of course, produced another delay, and, slight as it was, the difference was perceptible.

But, though they goaded the poor animals to make fresh exertions, it must be apparent that their chances of out-distancing their pursuers were very slight indeed.

Indeed one might say that it was impossible, for the gendarmes had had a relay of horses since they left Paris, and those horses, though strong and heavy, were yet capable of making excellent speed.

After the change had been made, however, they got on much faster than before.

Away they flew over the ill-kept roadway, their horses' hoofs continually striking fire as they caught against the flint stones which bestrewed it.

Somewhat to their astonishment, our friends soon afterwards found that, despite the adverse circumstances which oppressed them, they still maintained their distance from their foes, if, indeed, they did not slightly increase it.

But this is not so much to be wondered at when we give the subject a few moments' thought.

Without calling in the rusty adage that a stern chase is a long chase, we will call the reader's attention to a little circumstance which otherwise might have escaped them.

When a troop or body are in motion, and in pursuit of some object, one of the first things that is observed is for all to keep together, each one having his particular place, and each keeping pace with the others.

Now, in a number of horses, there will always be found a difference of quality. They may be all apparently up to one standard, and, for a certain distance, all of equal fleetness, but, after a time, when endurance is called into question, they will vary.

So it was with the horses upon which the gendarmes rode.

There were several in the troop who, singly, would quickly have caught up with the highwaymen, but by far the greater majority were quite incapable of it.

Such being the case, in order to keep together, those who could go fast had to accommodate their speed to those who went slowly, and thus our friends were able to keep ahead of them.

The gendarmes were not slow to perceive this, nor were they ignorant of the cause of it. Still it did not give them much disquietude, for they confidently calculated upon running down their prey in the long run.

The second in command of the troop, however, who was perhaps the best mounted of all, spoke to his superior officer, and requested leave to ride forward singly and overtake the fugitives, and if possible delay them until the main body of the troop came up.

The proposal was received with immediate favour, and accordingly this officer, who was quite a young man, struck his horse sharply upon the flank with his spurs, and quickly shot ahead of his companions.

The highwaymen soon became conscious of what had taken place, and they could hear this single horseman coming along at a furious pace behind them.

He was gaining, too, upon them, and that most rapidly.

Claude quite understood the tactics of this young officer, and could not but admire his bravery; still his own safety demanded that his attempt should be defeated.

Still he went on at the top of his speed, taking no further notice, while Sixteen-String Jack did the same.

Tom King, from his awkward and uncomfortable seat, looked back with very great anxiety.

On came the gendarme at a speed that was really terrific. At length he reached them.

Quick as thought, Claude Duval at that instant wheeled his horse round, while he called to his companions to continue their flight.

This injunction, however, was not obeyed.

Sixteen-String Jack halted, though, of course, from the awkward manner in which he was situated, he was not able to render the least assistance.

Claude Duval held his drawn sword in his hand.

The gendarme was similarly armed.

At the instant, then, that Claude wheeled round and made a desperate slash at his adversary, the gendarme put up his own weapon, and received the blow upon it, immediately giving Claude a blow back in return, which he only escaped by a movement of his horse.

This at once let Duval know that he had no novice in the use of the sword opposed to him, and it would require his utmost skill to bring the encounter to an end in a few seconds.

Of course, if it was prolonged, the main body would come up with them, and then resistance would be futile. There were very few, however, who could match with Claude in the use of the broadsword.

He had made it his particularly study, and had brought the art to the summit of perfection.

In addition to this, he had the advantage which a huge frame and immense personal strength gave him, so that every blow he gave, while it was delivered with great skill, descended with a force almost sufficient to break through all guard opposed to it.

Knowing, then, the importance of being speedy in what he was about, Claude attacked this young gendarme with great force and fury.

Their weapons clashed together with that sound which can be likened to nothing else, while the long blades of their swords gleamed with a faint radiance in the misty light.

The horses tramped, and neighed, and reared, and, like their riders, seemed in the excitement of the moment to forget the fatigue which they had undergone.

The combat did not last above eighty seconds.

During that brief interval of time, however, an incredible number of blows were given and received; but at the expiration of it, Claude, perceiving his opportunity, rose up in the stirrups, and brought down his sword with full force upon his opponent's head-piece.

The violence of the blow may be imagined when we say that it shivered Claude's sword like glass.

But it was effective for all that.

To be sure, the weapon did not cut through the steel helmet and reach the gendarme's head, but the concussion was so great that it completely stunned him, and he fell to the ground like a log of wood.

The horse stood still, trembling with fear.

Throwing away his now useless sword, Claude Duval caught hold of it by the bridle.

"Here, Tom! he said. "Quick! mount. Here is a capital steed for you!"

Tom King slipped off Sixteen-String Jack's horse in a moment, and ran towards Claude.

He was in the saddle instantly.

"Now forward. We have a better chance now. Spur your horses, or they will yet capture us."

Neither of his comrades required much urging to do this.

Their position was now considerably improved, and they began to indulge in the hope that they would, after all, succeed in baffling their foes.

But there seemed no signs of their being tired yet. They paused when they came to the body of the officer lying across the roadway, and one dismounted to attend to him, while the others swept on in pursuit, now much more exasperated against the highwaymen than they were before.

Previously they had acted merely because it was their duty. Now a kind of personal feeling was infused into the matter.

A personal feeling is always to be dreaded.

This young officer was much liked and respected, and they all pressed forward eager to avenge his death, for they jumped to the conclusion that he was either killed or fatally wounded.

And now our friends saw with dismay not only this additional impartment of vigour to their pursuers, but also that the two horses were in such a frightfully exhausted state that they threatened to fall down every moment.

The result of a hand-to-hand contest on foot, with four or five times their number opposed to them, could not be doubtful.

And as if the measure of their inconveniences should be full, they came to a long steep hill, up which they, with the greatest difficulty, urged their exhausted cattle.

Within about twenty yards of the top, Sixteen-String Jack's horse fell, and almost at the same instant that of Claude Duval.

Tom King was now the only one mounted.

His friends urged him to fly and make his escape while he had the opportunity, but this he refused to do.

"We must leave the high-road," he said, "and seek a shelter somewhere. We have a minute or two to do so, for the gendarmes will not be easily able to ascend this hill."

"They will not, indeed; but they are already at the foot."

"We must be speedy, then. Let us run to the brow of the hill, my friends, and endeavour to look around us. Perhaps we shall be able to see some place that will serve us for a shelter."

"Or, at all events, for a place which will enable us to intrench ourselves, and so give us a better chance with our foes than we should have upon even ground."

All three now ran to the summit of the hill, and looked about them, as well as the darkness would allow them.

Over a low wooden fence on their right hand, and about a hundred yards off, was a building of some sort or other, but what they could not tell.

They could only see an undistinguishable mass of something, the outlines of which were confused and dim.

But it was the only thing in sight, so they resolved to make their way towards it.

The gendarmes were now about half-way up the hill.

Tom King let go the bridle of his horse, and, hitting sharply, sent him at a gallop down the hill.

He and his two companions then leaped the fence, and, alighting, found themselves in a kind of meadow.

Upon a closer approach, they found the building to be a windmill.

It was built quite upon the brow of the hill.

But even in the night as it was, they could perceive that it was in an advanced stage of ruin and decay.

One of the long arms had been half broken away, while round about its base was spread an accumulation of rubbish, such as one always finds in places deserted by human beings.

"This will be the very place," said Tom King, "provided we can only make an entrance; and that I doubt not, from the appearance of the place, will be an easy enough matter."

"You must be quick," said Claude, "or the gendarmes will be upon us."

CHAPTER CCLXXVI.

DICK TURPIN REACHES THE OLD BAILEY IN SAFETY, AND IS TAKEN INTO COURT BY MR. KERSEY.

A cold frosty wind was careering through the streets when Dick Turpin, after his narrow escape from capture

turned in a direction which would lead him towards Newgate.

His body being greatly heated made him more sensible of this coolness in the atmosphere than he otherwise would have been, and he drew his apparel more closely around his person.

As he did this the natural thought occurred to him, that if he walked into the first clothier's shop he came to, and purchased one of the long ample cloaks at that period so much in vogue, it would not only shield him from the cold, but also serve as an admirable disguise.

Having come to this conclusion, and feeling the necessity there was for him to conceal his personal appearance in some way, Dick looked about him for a clothier's.

In London then, as now, he had not long to look for what he wanted.

Just a little lower down on the other side of the street he saw a tailor's.

It was no flaunting, pretentious establishment, such as might be seen now-a-days, but a quiet place, where only a little business appeared to be carried on.

But this was in appearance only.

Dick crossed over the street, and entered the shop without hesitation.

It went down a step from the street, and the highwayman was far from displeased when he found that the interior was quite dark—so dark, indeed, that he did not see the man who was minding the shop, until he spoke to him.

Dick quickly signified his wishes, and the man, taking his measure with his eye, soon supplied him with the article he required.

Turpin put it on, and making some remark about the coldness of the morning, drew it close up in his neck, and sallied out of the shop, looking quite a different personage to what he did when he entered it.

In a few minutes afterwards he reached Holborn, and this time the lower part.

The distance to Newgate was still considerable, so that if only for the sake of the time it would save, he sprang into a hackney-coach.

Having entered this unperceived, the chance of his being recognised was but slight.

Soon afterwards the cumbersome but really comfortable vehicle turned out of St. Dunstons-street into the Old Bailey.

A large number of persons were loitering about, while near the entrance to the vestibule of the prison, an unusual commotion appeared to be taking place.

But Turpin knew not the cause of it, though he might have hazarded a pretty good guess.

Passing by this, they came to that part of the huge, heart-chilling structure where the witnesses enter at such time as the court is sitting.

Before these doors the hackney-coachman halted, and then, gymnastically descending from his seat, came to the door and opened it.

Dick paid him about six times his proper fare before he alighted, so the driver was civil accordingly.

According to immemorial custom, several police-officers were lounging about the steps, or parading to and fro, but there was not one whose face was familiar to Turpin.

Wrapping his cloak around him, he descended from the carriage, and then almost the first person upon whom his eyes lighted was Mr. Kersey.

The lawyer had a very anxious look upon his face, and he was glancing up and down the street in a fidgety manner, as though he was waiting for some one who ought to have made his appearance earlier.

He did not recognise Dick, muffled up as he was, but the highwayman tapped him on the shoulder.

"Thank goodness you are here!" said the lawyer, with a sigh of relief; "I was beginning to get terribly alarmed about you."

"And well you might; I can assure you I have had a narrow escape of capture."

"But you are free?"

"Yes."

"Come this way, then."

"Have the proceedings commenced?"

"Yes, the court is opened."

"Then I am late?"

"Yes."

"But not too late, I hope?"

"Oh! dear, no."

"I am glad to hear that."

"The trial in which you feel so great an interest has not come on yet, though it stands next on the list. The one they have on now is a trivial one, and will not occupy much time."

"That is a great relief."

"And so was your presence to me. Come this way. The court is crowded to excess, but I shall be able to find a corner for you to stand in."

"That will do, and the more I am removed from public gaze the better I shall be pleased."

"Of course you will. I think I can manage that for you, and now understand, as we shall not have another chance of speaking together, that you will not be called upon unless it is absolutely necessary. Mr. Nuttall will do all he can to prevent it, but if he is obliged to call you, he will not do so until he has made an appeal to judge and jury to protect you."

"Enough, Mr. Kersey, I feel sure you will do all you possibly can for me."

"Rely upon that. Now, this way."

Mr. Kersey pushed open the door, and then Dick found himself within the precincts of the court.

It is scarcely possible for a stranger to enter this place without emotion.

The semi-darkness.

The strange, hushed silence.

The low monotonous voice of the judge.

All conspire to produce a benumbing influence upon the spirits.

The breath even is drawn painfully and by stealth, while every one has his sense of hearing stretched to the utmost.

The judge was passing sentence when Dick entered, so the court was unusually and profoundly silent.

The case, as Mr. Kersey had said, was a trivial one, and, indeed, it looked as though it had been arranged as a kind of prologue to the after part of the day's proceedings, as theatrical managers, when they produce any important drama, first have performed a piece of minor excellence, which serves as a foil to the one that follows it, and makes it seem all the better by comparison.

No such idea as this entered the minds of the officials, still the appearance to the breathless spectators was the same.

The prisoner—a woman—was removed from the dock, after which a brief interruption took place.

But soon all was still and orderly again.

The different counsel at the table busied themselves with their briefs.

The clerk of the arraigns turned over his parchment documents.

The oath was administered to the jury.

The judge took a fresh pen in his hand, and prepared paper, as though he anticipated he should have to take copious notes.

He was a venerable-looking man, with thin white hair scrupulously brushed, and having a benevolent expression of countenance; but his occasionally contracted brow, his steady glance, and firm compression of his lips, indicated that he was one who would administer justice with an impartial hand.

His decisions would be just and legal. There was neither leniency nor harshness; he was what is seldom to be found—an upright, strictly conscientious, and honourable judge.

Would there were more like him!

Then, when all these preparations were completed, there was a momentary pause in the proceedings.

But it was only momentary.

Then there came into the dock—

First, one of the men who had been captured in his attempt to escape from the haunted house.

Secondly, his companion.

Then Adrian Winberry.

His appearance created in the court an immense sensation.

Every eye was in a moment riveted upon his countenance.

Considering the important part he has played lately in our narrative, and, as he has appeared disguised, we think a few lines descriptive of his personal appearance cannot be out of place.

On the present occasion he had evidently taken immense pains with his toilette.

Perhaps he was desirous of winning the suffrage of those who might chance to see him.

In height, then, he was close upon six feet.

His form was in proportion to his height, for he was exceedingly muscular in appearance, and well built.

His hair was black, and his face of a dark, tawny colour, as though his skin had been for some time exposed to the fierce heat of a tropical sun.

The same thing was observable with his hands—they were almost the hue of a mulatto's.

His face was clean, and closely shaven.

The slight moustache that was upon his lip when he was examined before the magistrate had now disappeared.

But the most singular characteristic of his face has yet to be noticed.

His forehead was very broad, and very high.

Indeed, the hair seemed to have been removed from it, or else he was partially bald.

This portion, in consequence of being always covered, was quite white, and in contrast to his swarthy face seemed dazzlingly so.

At this singular appearance no one could help looking.

Having been once fully seen, he could be ever afterwards identified.

Upon taking his stand at the bar, he drew himself up with a haughty movement to his full height, and glanced round him proudly and calmly.

Then he made a deep and courteous bow to the judge, who unconsciously returned it.

A smile either of assumed innocence or else of desperate hardness was on his face.

Which of the two it was the reader knows.

But a human tribunal, like all other things human, is fallible and erring.

The guilty, when brought before it, are not always punished, nor are the innocent invariably set free.

CHAPTER CCLXXVII.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION STATES THE CASE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY AND HIS TWO ACCOMPLICES.

AMID a profound and deathlike silence, the clerk of the arraigns rose from his seat.

The faint rustling noise which he made as he turned over his papers, was plainly audible to every one within the crowded area.

Then, in a rapid voice, he read the indictments against the prisoners.

It is not necessary to trouble the reader with the contents of this document, full as it was of the technicalities of legal phraseology.

The substance of it will appear in the speech for the prosecution.

And every one appeared to think so—so very little attention was paid to what the clerk said.

It seems to be always a point aimed at by these gentry to read over the indictment without pausing once to draw breath, and without making any stop between their words.

Why they do this is best known to themselves, but if they think it makes them better understood, they labour under an extraordinary delusion.

But perhaps they look upon it as a necessary but troublesome form they have to go through, and they feel that the sooner it is over the better both for themselves and those who have to listen to it.

Be it how it may, the clerk quickly gabbled over it, and then sat down looking very red in the face, and very much out of breath.

Then there was another pause.

The spectators drew a long breath.

They felt that the trial was now about to begin in good earnest.

All three of the prisoners put in the plea not guilty.

With breathless expectation they waited for the counsel for the prosecution to commence his speech.

Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey whispered together, and then the former rose.

He settled his gown about him, and took from the sands of one of his assistants a folded paper.

Then he commenced his address as follows:—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"It is my duty on the present occasion to lay before you the details of one of the most remarkable cases that have ever fallen under my notice, and I have no doubt you will coincide with me as regards its singularity.

"The charge against the three prisoners at the bar, as shown by the indictment, involves abduction, conspiracy, and murder, three of the most heinous crimes they could possibly commit.

"The evidence that I shall bring before you is of a character that will fully bear out and substantiate all that I am about to say.

"My province is as briefly and as clearly as possible, to lay before you a succinct account of all that has taken place.

"My lord and gentlemen of the jury, the best way in which I can do that is to begin at the beginning, and relate things as they occurred.

"Between the villages of Hendon and Hampstead there stands a large stone residence surrounded by spacious grounds, which was in the possession of a gentleman much loved and respected in the neighbourhood in which he lived, for the consistent kindness and urbanity of his behaviour to all persons, and upon all occasions.

"The name of this gentleman was William Winberry, commonly called by his tenants and the residents around, Squire Winberry.

"This house and estate had been bequeathed to him by his father, who was one of the richest merchants in the city, and amassed a large fortune by his industry and frugality.

"William Winberry was the eldest son, and consequently the heir. He had a brother some years younger than himself. I should, perhaps, say half-brother, for they were by different mothers, Mr. William Winberry having been twice married.

"As has been the case from the earliest times, and as the case always will be, these two half-brothers were not friendly with each other. Yet, in impartiality, I must say, that this unkindness was wholly and solely caused by the younger brother, Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar."

Upon hearing these words everyone, without a single exception, who was in the court, bent their eyes upon Adrian, who shrank slightly before so close and undivided a scrutiny.

He was much paler than he was when the investigation commenced, and those who were near noticed he pressed his teeth closely together.

He had never expected the revelations that had just been made.

Nothing that had previously taken place in the proceedings gave him any clue to it, and his guilty heart told him that the counsel for the prosecution, from the manner in which he had commenced, was in full possession of all the facts of the case.

He felt his position to be a very dangerous and awkward one.

But he was not master of his own actions. He would have to stand where he was, and abide by the result.

Mr. Nuttall continued, and his whole attention was absorbed by what he said. He literally hung upon every word.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"It ill becomes any one to speak ill of the dead, but there are certain things which I cannot pass over without making some allusion to them.

"Mr. William Winberry, senior, then, the father of the prisoner at the bar, lived very unhappily with his second wife. The circumstance is well known, and the motives which caused unhappiness need not be mentioned here. These are unimportant.

"Suddenly, however, it is not known from what cause, Mrs. Winberry totally altered her behaviour to her husband, and they seemed once more to live happily together. But soon after this she fell a victim to an epidemic which was decimating the neighbourhood.

"To this disorder her husband likewise fell a victim, and died a few days after. Both were interred in one grave."

"My lord," said one of the barristers, rising to his feet, "I must really protest against the manner in which

my learned friend is opening the case for the prosecution. This family romance to which he is now treating us is most irrelevant to the case and prejudicial to my client, the charge against whom is that of murder upon the person of an old man whose body is not known."

The judge looked inquiringly at Mr. Nuttall, who hastened to reply.

"My lord, my learned brother, who appears to be intrusted with the case for the defence is slightly in error with respect to the statements he has made, for I shall bring witnesses to prove the relevancy of this piece of family romance, as my learned brother calls it, and also witnesses who will identify the body, and give such evidence as will in every respect bear out what I say."

"That is enough," said the judge. "Proceed."

"But, my lord"—said the counsel for the defence. "You will have an opportunity given you for making whatever remarks you may think proper as regards this case now under investigation."

The counsel sat down with a mortified look upon his face.

Adrian Winberry scowled.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury," resumed Mr. Nuttall, "I will continue my narrative from the point at which it was interrupted."

"After the funeral of Mr. and Mrs. Winberry, of course the will was sought for."

"This, the lawyer stated, he had seen put by the deceased into a cabinet of antique workmanship, which stood in his bed-chamber."

"But, on going to this cabinet, no will was to be found."

"This, however, proved to be of no consequence, for the lawyer stated that, in anticipation of some such occurrence, two wills had been drawn up, both of which were exactly the same. One of these was in his possession, and accordingly he produced it."

"By virtue of this document the bulk of the wealth and property was bequeathed to the eldest son, William, and to Adrian was left a clear annual income of eight hundred pounds, and no more."

"After reading the will, the brothers met and quarrelled. What passed between them, of course none can tell. After it, Adrian departed, and was not seen at his brother's house for many years. What became of him during that period no one knows."

"And now William Winberry, about two years after his father's death, married, and the issue of that marriage was one child, a daughter, whose mother died in giving her birth."

"And passing over a long period of years we come to the things which have recently happened, but which could not have been properly understood without this allusion to the past."

"During this interval, Mr. Winberry led the calm and happy life of a country gentleman. His daughter grew up in grace and beauty, and he doated upon her with a rare affection."

"But this happy state of things was destined to be interrupted."

"After all this long absence Adrian returned."

"He sought for and obtained an interview with his brother."

"It afterwards transpired what took place between them on this occasion. Adrian, large and sufficient as his annual income was, had squandered it all, and had come back, not to ask his brother for assistance, but to endeavour to wrest money from him."

"This William Winberry refused to permit, and for a second time did the brothers part in anger."

"About a month after this, Blanche—for that was the name of the daughter—disappeared."

"She had last been seen walking out in the grounds alone, as was her wont, but although the closest search was made, not a trace of her could be found."

"On one of the occasions, when all hope of finding her had been abandoned by all but the father, the bereaved parent set out alone upon his melancholy search."

"That night he never returned."

"Nor the next, nor the next, and from that time nothing could be heard of either father or daughter."

"The only person left in the house besides the domestic was a young lady, a playmate and companion of Blanche's,

who will come forward as one of the witnesses in this dark and intricate affair."

CHAPTER CCLXXVIII.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE CROSS-EXAMINES THE POLICE-OFFICER, AND ACCUSES DICK TURPIN OF THE MURDER.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"I am well aware that my opening speech has already exceeded the limit considered usual in these cases, but I must beg of you to bear in mind that I have used no circumlocution, but have confined myself to a bare recital of facts."

"But much as I have said, more remains to be told. Indeed, my speech here naturally divides itself into two portions, each of which bear equally upon the other."

"I now come to the part which seems, nevertheless, more intimately acquainted with the matter in hand."

"Without saying how or by whom these persons were abducted, I will take up the thread of my narrative at the point where the charge against the prisoner begins."

"In the Birdcage-walk, as that broad road leading through St. James's-park is called, there stands a row of mansions."

"Not one of you, perhaps, have failed to see them."

"These houses are all well built, commodious residences, and from their desirable position and splendid prospect, command a large rent."

"But the property has recently deteriorated in value from a rather remarkable cause."

"One of these houses to which I am alluding incurred very many years back the imputation of being haunted."

"Whether the grounds upon which this imputation rested were well or ill-founded it is not for me to say, but at all events the house was shut up and abandoned to ruin and decay, for no one could be found to live in it."

"From this cause, then, the adjoining property suffered abatement in value."

"And now, on the twenty-seventh of the past month, and close upon midnight, one of the police-officers employed at Bow-street, whose name is Pursford, was walking along in front of the houses mentioned, when his attention was suddenly arrested by the stealthy and mysterious approach of three persons."

"Secrecy was evidently desired by them, from the manner in which they walked along the street."

"Two of these men were attired in ordinary costumes, the third was enveloped in a cloak which completely concealed his form."

"Perceiving the suspicious appearance of these persons, Pursford, the officer, shrunk back into the shadow of the houses, and resolved to keep a watch upon their actions."

"What was his surprise to see them, after cautiously looking round to ascertain whether they were observed, cross the road and disappear beneath the projecting doorway of the haunted house."

"This looked more suspicious than before."

"Pursford left his place of concealment, and came to the doorway of the haunted house."

"It was closed."

"The three mysterious individuals had entered it."

"Convinced that something was wrong, Pursford, being alone, ran off for assistance, and returned about half-an-hour afterwards, bringing a strong force with him."

"Finding the door fast, they broke it open, and ascended the stairs."

"In a room on the second floor they found the body of a man weltering in his blood, his head being almost shattered by a pistol-ball—the features were so disfigured as to make identification by them impossible."

"Seeing a door before them, the officers rushed through it, and captured the two men—one in the gardens, and the other in the act of leaping over into St. James's-park, whither the one in the cloak, and doubtless the principal in the crime, had already made his way."

"But in that large space there was little hope of finding any one, so they gave up the attempt, and contented themselves with leaving the house in charge of the police, and escorting their two prisoners to Newgate."

"And now I must break off to say that on that particular night a notorious criminal had concealed himself in the park, all the avenues from which were guarded, while others searched the grounds."

"Suddenly the man who was on duty at Spring-gardens' gate heard some one approaching, and pounced upon him.

"The other party of searchers now came up, and labouring under the idea that he was the person of whom they were in quest, they carried him straightway to Newgate.

"In the vestibule of the prison, however, the mistake was discovered. They had not caught the person they thought, but Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar, who thereupon indignantly demanded his release, and was about to be set free, when the officers arrived, bringing the two men they had captured at the haunted house.

"Between them and the prisoner at the bar a mutual and immediate recognition took place, which will be distinctly sworn to by several persons.

"Afterwards, however, the recognition was disclaimed by the prisoners, the one asserting that he knew them not, and the others saying that they had made a mistake, as the officers themselves had.

"At any rate, the governor of Newgate thought fit to retain Adrian Winberry a prisoner, and on being brought before a magistrate in due course, he, in common with the men beside him, was pronounced guilty of murder, and sentenced to take his trial in this court, at the bar of which he now stands.

"Such, my lord, is the case against the prisoner at the bar, who stands accused of obtaining a document from his brother, William Winberry, by force, in which the whole of his wealth and estates were made over to him, and also of sending down an attorney to his brother's house, and commissioning him to take possession of the place in his name.

"And now, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, I have brought to a conclusion the longest address I have ever before delivered; but it ought rather to be termed a statement of bare facts than an address.

"It now remains for me to call such evidence as will substantiate that which I have stated to you, after which it will be your province to decide."

Mr. Nuttall sat down amidst a slight hum of applause, which was immediately stifled by the crier.

Mr. Nuttall was quite exhausted, and therefore one of his assistants rose to call the witnesses.

The first witness called was Shockley, the steward.

It is not requisite to give his evidence in full—it is enough to say that he deposed to the main facts in the life of William Winberry, and also how both his master and daughter had been carried off, all which entirely agreed with what Mr. Nuttall had stated, so that that part of the question was disposed of.

The next witness called was the police-officer.

"Abel Pursford!" said the crier.

In obedience to this call, and in an off-hand, every-day manner, the police-officer entered the witness-box, and swore to the facts which the counsel for the prosecution had related.

The counsel for the defence had not troubled Shockley, the steward. Perhaps he felt that there was nothing to be made out of him.

But as soon as the junior counsel for the prosecution had done asking Pursford questions, he was upon his feet in a moment.

Assuming a loud dictatorial manner, he said—

"Now, Able Pursford, listen to me, if you please."

"Yes, sir."

"You saw three men enter the haunted house, you say? Now, what sort of looking men were they?"

"I could not see very well, because it was dark. They were ordinary-looking men, and one wore a long black cloak."

"Oh! ordinary-looking men, were they? Now, what do you mean by ordinary?"

"Ordinary?"

"Yes; do you mean they were just such looking men as you would find in London streets at any time?"

"Yes, sir; with the exception of the one in the cloak."

"Oh! very good. With the exception of the one in the cloak? Now, what was there not ordinary about him?"

"The cloak, sir."

"Oh! and was it a very extraordinary looking cloak?"

"Well, no, sir: not very."

"Not very? Not a very extraordinary looking cloak? Just so. Now, it was quite a common-looking cloak, I dare say, and such as any gentleman might put on to keep him warm on a cold winter's night?"

"Well, yes, sir, it might."

"I thought so. There turns out to be nothing remarkable about it, after all. It was a little bit heightened by your imagination, I dare say. You admit that the three men you saw enter were just such as I might meet in the street at any time?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"Exactly," said the counsel for the defence, looking round him with a triumphant air.

He had certainly achieved a great deal, for he had destroyed the identity of the prisoners. Mr. Pursford could not swear they were the same he had seen enter, after making such an admission as that.

"Stop a moment, Mr. Pursford, I have not done with you yet. After you watched these three men in—by-the-by, will you swear they are the three prisoners at the bar?"

"Well, sir, I"—

"Will you swear the men you saw enter are the prisoners at the bar? Recollect you are on your oath, and perjury is punished heavily, both in this world and the next. Can you swear to them?"

"Not by their looks I can't, sir."

"Of course not. Then how else can you swear to them?"

"I'll swear that those two standing this side are the same that I captured in the house when I broke into it, and that is much the same thing to my thinking."

"Oh! but it isn't. It's quite a different affair altogether. Will you swear to the other prisoner?"

"No, sir, I can't swear to him."

"Very good, then, that is just what I wanted to come at; but stop a moment, I have not done with you yet. I have a question or two more to ask you Mr. Pursford."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE TRIES TO BOTHER THE JURY, AND CHARGES DICK TURPIN WITH THE MURDER OF WILLIAM WINBERRY.

THE counsel for the defence inflated his cheeks as he spoke, and looked very knowing and pompous, while the spectators looked anxiously to see what piece of cleverness was going to follow.

But Pursford, the police-officer, preserved an unruffled demeanour.

It was not the first time he had stood in the witness-box, nor was it the first time he had stood the test of a cross-examination.

His coolness seemed to aggravate the counsel slightly, for the officer seemed to say by his looks, "Proceed, I am quite ready to answer any question you may think proper to ask me."

"Now, Mr. Pursford."

"Yes, sir."

"You say you saw three ordinary-looking people enter the house in Birdcage-walk, to whose identity you do not like to positively swear?"

"I have already answered that question."

"Oh! very good—very good. You have already answered that question. Well; perhaps you will have no objection to answer another. When you watched these persons in, you went to the door yourself, did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And found it fast?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you set out for assistance. Now, how long do you think you were away?"

"About half-an-hour."

"Just so; and, during your absence, did you leave any watch upon the door of this said haunted house?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! you did not leave any watch? Just take a note of that, if you please, gentlemen of the jury. He left no watch at the door while he went away. Then, Mr. Pursford, it is just possible that some other persons might have entered the house during his absence, and that those he saw enter might have left it."



[TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE BESIEGED BY THE GENDARMES IN THE OLD MILL.]

"Really," interrupted the judge, "I cannot see the drift of these questions."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said the counsel for the defence, not abashed in the slightest, for his object was to bother the jury, and get them into a kind of fog. "I beg your pardon, my lord, it concerns the identity of a witness."

"I rot at all—not at all. The witness says he cannot say positively that those were the men he saw enter the house, though I believe I am right in saying that such is his impression. But this the witness does most distinctly swear to—the two prisoners at the bar are the men he captured while endeavouring to escape from the haunted house, therefore I cannot help considering these questions unnecessary and irrelevant."

"I bow before your opinion, my lord," said the counsel, "and will take up my questions at another point, and I trust I shall be able, not only to remove the imputation of guilt from my innocent client, but fix it upon the real culprit."

These words were spoken with great emphasis, and had the effect of attracting the attention of every person in court, while the jury nodded their heads, and looked preternaturally wise.

"Now, Mr. Pursford, said the counsel for the defence, as he adjusted his gown to his satisfaction, "when you broke into the haunted house—I believe I am right in saying you broke in?"

"Quite right, sir."

"Just so, Mr. Pursford—just so! Now, when you broke in you were on the ground floor of the house, of course."

"I was, sir, in the entrance-hall."

"Exactly, as you say, in the entrance-hall. Now, such being the case, will you be good enough to inform the jury what circumstance induced you to go upstairs, because it appears to me by my notes that you found the dead body on the second floor."

"You are quite right about where we found the dead body. It was upon the second floor."

"Then what induced you to go up there, for it appears to me that you did go up, and that direct, too. Be good enough to answer that question, Mr. Pursford."

"Certainly, sir. Before we struck a stroke upon the door we all heard the loud report of a pistol."

"Who do you mean by we? Take care, sir; you are upon your oath, recollect."

"Myself, and the police-officers I had got with me."

"Oh! I am I to understand that you heard the report of the pistol yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I did hear it."

"Very good. You swear that?"

"I do."

"That is enough, then; hearing the report of the pistol I suppose, coupled with the suspicions which had arose from what you saw, removed whatever scruples you might have had, and you at once proceeded to demolish the door?"

"You are right, sir; that was just it."

"But am I also to understand that as you stood outside of the house, and heard the report of a pistol, you could tell precisely from what portion of the house the sound came, and that you mounted to the second-floor accordingly?"

"No, sir."

"How was it, then?"

"When we got inside, the first thing we all did was to unmask our lanterns and look about us. The first thing we noticed was the dust on the floor."

"What made you notice such a trivial thing as that? Gentlemen of the jury, don't be impatient, I shall get the piece of information I am short of directly."

"The house had been shut up for a considerable length of time," said the police-officer, in reply to the question propounded to him by the counsel for the defence, "and the consequence was that the dust had accumulated in it in the most surprising quantities, and on the floor of the entrance-hall it lay almost as thickly as snow."

"Oh! indeed, very singular, but if it lay as thickly as snow, I presume it was of rather a different look."

"It resembled snow in this respect—it left the distinct impression of every foot that trod upon it."

"Oh! did it?"

"Yes, and upon looking down on the ground we saw by the aid of the light which the lantern afforded us, that there were the impressions of very many feet, and we at once followed them."

"Then, I suppose it was these footprints in the dust that conducted you so quickly to the second floor?"

"It was, sir; and not only that, we could smell the gunpowder, and hear the rapid tramping of footsteps, as of persons attempting to escape."

"And then, according to the evidence you have given, you entered the room and found the dead body of a man, and you captured two men escaping from the premises."

"That is right, sir."

"And did you look at the faces of the men you captured?"

"I did."

"When and where?"

"At the time of capture and at the time I gave them into custody of Mr. Cawthorn, in the vestibule of Newgate."

"And now, looking at the two men at the bar, are you prepared to swear that they are the two you captured?"

"I am, sir, quite ready."

"Which are the two?"

"Those standing nearest me."

This was conclusive, and the counsel for the defence could say nothing to it.

And now several persons in the court witnessed Mr. Kersey and Mr. Nuttall sending mysterious little billets one to another, and at the end Mr. Nuttall said, addressing the judge:

"My lord, I am instructed by the attorney for the prosecution to ask this witness one or two more questions of very great importance, which will serve to throw considerable light upon the question of the identity of the prisoners."

The judge bowed his head assentingly, and amid a general curiosity, Mr. Nuttall asked Pursford, the officer, the following questions, to which he replied readily enough.

"When you arrived at Newgate with the two prisoners

was not something of rather an unusual character taking place there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be good enough to explain, as briefly as you can, what was taking place."

"Mr. Cawthorn, the governor, and several turnkeys, and other persons were in the vestibule all engaged in talking about something very excitedly, and the subject of the conversation was Mr. Adrian Winberry, the prisoner at the bar, who was there a prisoner."

"Just so. Now you are quite ready to swear you make no mistake. Is it the same who now stands at the bar?"

"It is, sir."

"Well, now, something else took place, did there not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"The moment the two prisoners caught sight of Adrian Winberry, they uttered ejaculations of recognition."

"And did Adrian Winberry recognise them in return?"

"I cannot swear so positively to that, but it is my belief he did, for he started and looked extremely vexed when the two prisoners said they knew him."

"That is sufficient. There were several others present who noticed the recognition?"

"Oh! yes, sir."

"And are you prepared to swear that the prisoner at the bar, Adrian Winberry, is the same person that you found in custody in the vestibule of Newgate upon the occasion in question?"

"I am, sir."

Mr. Nuttall sat down.

But the counsel for the defence was on his legs again instantly.

"Now, Mr. Pursford, attend to me. It appears you have a tolerably good recollection of what took place in the vestibule of the prison?"

"I recollect all the circumstances quite well."

"Then did it not transpire that Mr. Adrian Winberry had been taken prisoner by mistake?"

"Yes, sir. They had taken him under the idea that he was another person."

"And pray who was the other person they mistook him for, Mr. Pursford?"

"Dick Turpin."

"Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

"The very same, sir."

"Now, gentlemen of the jury," said the counsel for the defence, "Now, gentlemen, I have arrived at the point of which I spoke. Please to bear in mind that this witness distinctly swears that my client, Mr. Adrian Winberry, was taken prisoner in mistake for Dick Turpin, the highwayman."

CHAPTER CCLXXX.

THE MYSTERIOUS LADY REVEALS HERSELF, AND HER BEAUTY CAUSES HER TO BE A POPULAR FAVOURITE. Now, if the truth must be told, the jury themselves did not see anything in this to make such a rumpus about; but they said nothing, and waited in dignified silence to hear the rest.

More imposingly than before did the counsel for the defence arrange his robes and settle his immaculate peruke upon his head.

"Mr. Pursford, have you ever seen Dick Turpin, the highwayman?"

"Yes, sir, once."

"Only once?"

"That is all, sir."

"Should you know him if you saw him again?"

"I think I should. Once seeing a person is generally enough for me."

"I have no doubt. That, of course, is a part of your profession. Well, will you swear that the person in the cloak was not Dick Turpin?"

"Which person, sir?"

"The person who was enveloped in a cloak, and accompanied by two others, you saw cross the road and enter the haunted house."

Mr. Pursford hesitated.

The counsellor saw it, and the question was repeated in a louder and more emphatic tone of voice.

"I won't swear that it was not—"

"There! The witness won't swear that the man in the

cloak was not Dick Turpin, from which I think the inference is clear, that this villainous highwayman, who has made all England ring with his crimes, is the author of this murder!"

This announcement, uttered as it was with extreme vehemence, took the court by surprise.

Dick Turpin, however, was the one who was the most astounded.

Never in all his life had he felt such an inclination to knock any one down as he did to knock down the counsel for the defence.

Knowing all the circumstances from first to last, of course the reader is well aware how utterly groundless was this charge which the counsel brought against him.

Nothing but the thought of the service he should be able to render the mysterious lady and Blanche, whom he had never seen, could have kept him back.

As it was, however, he remained immovable.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I proclaim my client to be perfectly innocent of the crime wherewith he is charged, and Dick Turpin, the highwayman, guilty of it."

Hearing this, Mr. Pursford was about to step out of the witness box, but Mr. Nuttall, with a wave of his hand, stopped him.

"You seemed to break off in what you were going to say just now, is it not so?"

"Yea sir."

"Finish your sentence, then, if you please."

"I intended to say, that, though I could not swear that it was not Dick Turpin I saw with the two men cross the road and enter the haunted house, yet I did not for a moment think it was him."

"Oh! very good, that will do."

"May I stand down?"

"Yes, provided my learned brother does not want to ask you any more questions."

"No, there is nothing more," said the counsel for the defence.

"Mr. Pursford," said Mr. Nuttall, struck with a sudden thought, and preventing the officer accomplishing his escape from the witness-box, which he seemed very desirous to do. "You can go now, but, in all probability, I shall want to call you again at another stage of the proceedings."

With this injunction, Pursford was allowed to take his departure.

"So far there was very little elucidated, though all that they had heard served but to stimulate the desire they felt to hear the sequel.

After Pursford several more witnesses were called, who did no more than corroborate what he had said, but it is not worth while to give all in detail, since it would be nothing but a recapitulation of what has gone before.

We pass on.

"Maud Gouldman!" said Mr. Nuttall's assistant.

The name was repeated by the crier.

Dick Turpin looked up when he heard this name pronounced, curious in the extreme to know who would respond to it, though he more than half suspected who it was.

Nor were his anticipations wrong.

The mysterious lady, in whom Dick felt so much interest, was ushered into the witness-box.

She commanded the instant and universal attention of the whole court.

She was attired as she had been during the whole of the time Dick Turpin had known her—that is to say, in deep black.

The dazzling fairness of her unweathered skin was displayed to the utmost advantage by it; and her extreme beauty drew many a sigh of envy from those females who were in the court, and many a sigh of admiration from those of the opposite sex.

Judge and jury alike turned round and gazed upon her while they prepared themselves to listen to what she was about to say with more than ordinary attention.

Such is the influence which personal beauty will always produce.

From where he stood Dick had an excellent view of her.

He had seen her very many times during their brief acquaintance, and under many aspects.

In all she had looked extremely beautiful.

Her beauty, too, was of that kind which never fails to win the human heart, and elicit its warmest sympathies.

Her beauty was of that bold attractive character which some so much admire.

One expression was ever on her countenance, and so plain a one that no one could mistake it.

That expression was pure, candid, truthful innocence.

Her features were small and somewhat Madonna-like in their general configuration, especially when she was pensive.

Her forehead was broad, but not particularly high—still high enough for the peculiar style of beauty.

No Parian marble could have vied in whiteness with it, and the contrast between it and her dark—almost black hair, which was parted smoothly upon it—made that whiteness all the more apparent.

Upon finding herself in so conspicuous a position, and with so many eyes fixed upon her, a flush of colour mounted up into her cheeks, and remained there, enhancing in a very great degree her wondrous loveliness.

Mr. Nuttall considerably paused a few moments before questioning her, in order that she might recover her composure somewhat, and be able to reply to him with clearness and precision.

At length he spoke.

"Your name is Maud Gouldman, I believe?"

She inclined her head.

"That answer is not deemed sufficient. You must be good enough to reply in words."

"It is, sir."

"That will do. Will you be good enough to relate what you know as touching this case now under investigation?"

She began thus.

Her voice at first was low and almost inaudible, but as she proceeded she gathered confidence, and spoke in a louder tone.

But so desirous was every one to hear every word that came from her lips, that the silence of the grave prevailed in the crowded court.

"I am distantly related to the family of the Winberrys. Between Blanche Winberry and myself there has always existed a strong attachment—it dates from our infancy. We are not, strictly speaking, cousins, but from our intimacy we have assumed that title."

"Does this bear upon the case?" asked the judge, looking towards Mr. Nuttall.

"It does, my lord. But should you prefer the witness to tell her story in her own way, or shall I elicit the testimony I require from her by questions?"

"By questions, I think."

"Very good, my lord. I have no doubt it will save time." Then, looking at Maud Gouldman, he said—

"From your infancy you have resided with the deceased Mr. Winberry, have you not?"

"I have. I was an orphan, and he adopted me."

"Will you be good enough to look towards the prisoners at the bar?"

The witness turned her eyes in that direction.

"Do you know either of them—I mean, have you seen either of them before?"

"I have sir."

"Which one?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Point him out to the court."

"He is the one standing furthest from me. The dark one with the white forehead."

This was so prominent and distinguishing a feature that there could be no doubt whatever as to the identification.

"When have you seen him?"

"Only once."

"And when was that?"

"About six weeks ago."

"What was the occasion?"

"It was at the Hall."

"You mean the residence of Mr. William Hampstead."

"Yea sir."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"I was in the library with Blanche and her father, when the servant announced Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Continue, please."

"Mr. Winberry desired us both to leave the room, saying

as he did so, that he did not wish us to take any notice of him."

"What then?"

"We obeyed—that is, Blanche and myself—~~and~~ in crossing the hall, we encountered him."

"Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak?"

"No, he merely bowed and passed on."

"But you saw him very plainly?"

"Oh! yes, he had his hat off as he has now, and I noticed the difference in colour in the upper and lower parts of his face."

"So you can swear to his identity unhesitatingly."

"I can sir."

"That point, then, I presume is settled. Can you tell what took place between the brothers at the meeting spoken of?"

"I was not present, but, after he had gone, I returned with Blanche to the library, where we found her father much agitated. His daughter, of whom he was extremely—dotingly fond, questioned him closely respecting his agitation, and tried her best to soothe him, when he told her, in my presence, that his brother had squandered away the income left him by his father, and had endeavoured to compel him to advance him money, which he refused to do. High words rose between them, and he said that he had forbidden him ever to enter his doors again."

CHAPTER COLXXXI.

MAUD GOULDMAN'S EVIDENCE PROVES TO BE VERY IMPORTANT INDEED.

It is questionable whether there could have been found in the whole court a single person who did not implicitly believe every word which Maud Gouldman uttered.

All, save one, bent upon her looks of approval and admiration.

That one was Adrian Winberry.

With folded arms and lowering brows, he stood at the bar and scowled at her.

No stranger was he to those effects by which the human heart is awayed, and he saw with execration the feeling of favour with which this witness was received.

He knew how fearfully every word she uttered would militate against him, and how hopeless would be the attempt to disprove a single one of her statements.

But, like a straw upon the surface of the water, he had no control over himself, but was forced to drift with the tide.

Mr. Nuttall made another pause, affecting to be searching for something among his papers, in order that Maud should quite recover herself, and not lose her presence of mind and say something which would at all tend to throw discredit upon her evidence.

"Now what is the next event which happened in connexion with the present matter? Did you see Adrian Winberry again?"

"No, sir; he did not come near, and Blanche's father particularly requested us never to mention his name to him, because he wished to forget that he had so unworthy a brother in existence."

"Those were his words, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; as nearly as I can remember them."

"Just so; and now what happened next?"

"It was about a month after the visit of Adrian to the hall that Blanche went out to walk in the grounds in the evening, as she was frequently in the habit of doing."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see her go?"

"Yes; she kissed me before she went, and I stood at one of the windows and watched her across the lawn."

"What time was that?"

"I do not remember exactly, but it was some considerable time before sunset."

"What then?"

"I have never seen her since that time."

"Then, I understand you to say that she walked out alone in the manner you have described, and never returned again."

"Yes, sir, that is it."

"Now continue, if you please."

"When it grew dusk her father inquired for her, and then it was discovered that she had not come back from her walk. Her father, whose affection for her knew no bounds, got terribly anxious and alarmed, but suspecting no ill, I went out with him in search of her."

"And that search was fruitless?"

"Quite; not a trace of her could we find. We returned to inquire whether she had come back, and were replied to in the negative. It was then quite dark, and we all grew frightened. Her father, accompanied by the men-servants on the estate, and provided with lanterns, set out again in search of her, bidding me keep the house. They returned some hours afterwards, tired out, and unable to find the least trace of the object which they sought."

"And she was not found, you say?"

"Never! The neighbours all—for they knew and loved her—joined with her father in the search for many days ensuing, but at last all except her father gave it up in despair. He, however, continued it alone, being all the time distracted with grief for the loss of his daughter, whom he loved more than he loved his own life."

Upon reaching this point in her evidence, Maud broke down.

More than once she had stifled the sobs which rose up in her throat, and restrained the tears which were ready to gush from her eyes.

But at length she found she could do so no longer.

Her emotion could no longer be subdued, and she wept bitterly.

There were many moist eyes in the court, for the simple, clear, and truthlike manner in which she had given her evidence touched the hearts of all, and even the stern judge, under the pretence of wiping the perspiration from his forehead, wiped a tear from the corner of his eye.

A chair was called for and placed in the witness-box for her to sit down upon.

A glass of water was brought for her to drink.

Indeed, all seemed to vie with each other in offering her attentions.

But after a brief pause, during which she composed herself, she rose to her feet to show that she was ready for her examination to continue.

"Would you like a longer rest?" asked Mr. Nuttall, kindly.

"No, sir, I thank you; I do not wish to waste the time of those present; I am quite ready, if you will resume your questions."

"Very well, then; I will do so, and as briefly as I can, in order to release you from your unpleasant situation."

Maud bowed.

"You were speaking of Mr. Winberry?"

"Yes; I said that though his friends and neighbours gave up the search in despair, he did not, but continued it himself."

"Did he go alone?"

"Not at first; he took the servants with him, but in a little while he tired them completely out. As for himself, he seemed unconscious of fatigue, and rather than relinquish the search, continued it himself alone and undaid."

"For how long did he continue it?"

"Only a few days. Like Blanche, he went out and never returned."

"How strange."

"Very strange. I was then the only one left at the hall with the exception of the domestics, and what to do I knew not."

"What did you do eventually?"

"I asked for advice, and was referred to Mr. Winberry's solicitor, Mr. John Kersey, who came down to the Hall, and to whom I related all the particulars."

"Just so; then that, I presume, is sufficient so far. Now, be good enough to tell me what followed."

"By Mr. Kersey's advice I came up to London to his house. He then took me to view the body of a man who had been found murdered in a house in the B'd-age-walk."

"Well."

"The features were much disfigured—obliterated I might say—but I recognised him instantly."

"And who was it?"

"Blanche's father."

A strange sound in the crowded court followed this announcement.

Everybody expected the reply which would be given to the question, and the moment the simple words, "Blanche's father," were uttered, every one in court drew in his breath involuntarily, and it was this simultaneous inhalation of breath into so many lungs, which produced the strange sound we have mentioned.

United, they formed a kind of gasping sob.

But Mr. Nuttall, after waiting a moment for this reply to have its full effect, resumed his interrogation.

"You are quite certain that you were not mistaken in the identity of the dead body?"

"Quite sure."

"It was he whom you had known in life as Mr. William Winberry?"

"It was."

"But if the features were, as you say, almost obliterated, how is it you can be so positive with regard to his identification?"

"I went by his general appearance to some extent, and besides, I was shown the clothes, which I could swear to as being those worn by him when I last saw him."

"And was there anything more to assist you in this identification?"

"Yes, something which put it beyond all reasonable doubt."

"Will you tell us what it is?"

"Mr. William Winberry was slightly lame in his left foot, and was in the habit of walking with a stick. The lameness was caused by a heavy weight once falling upon his foot and almost crushing it. I believe some of the bones were crushed, but at any rate it left the upper part of his foot a purplish-black. The accident happened when I was a little child, though I remember it perfectly well, and have seen his foot as I have described it to you a thousand times."

"And did the left foot of this dead body exhibit the appearance which you have just described?"

"It did."

"And therefore you dismissed all doubts from your mind?"

"I did."

"And when did you see this body?"

"This morning, just before the commencement of the trial."

"Where?"

"In an adjoining room."

"My lord," said Mr. Nuttall, "I have done with this witness for the present. The evidence she has given, you cannot fail to see, is most important. In my humble judgment there should be a pause made in the proceedings here, in order that the jury may have an opportunity of inspecting the body of the deceased, and ascertaining whether it presents the appearance she has described. Of course, I say this without prejudice to my learned brother for the defence, who may wish to cross-examine Miss Maud Gouldman."

The defending counsel rose up—

"I have no questions. I wish to ask Miss Maud Gouldman. I would not be guilty of the rudeness of insinuating that she has misstated or perverted any fact."

This sentiment, concurring so well as it did with the opinion of the mass of spectators who thronged the court, produced a loud demonstration of applause, which no one attempted to check.

The counsel for the defence sat down with a smile on his face.

A politic man was that counsel for the defence.

He knew well enough that he shared in the odium which hung over his client.

He knew that the popular feeling was against him.

He knew the unfavourable nature of the comparison which would be instituted between Adrian Winberry and Maud Gouldman.

To have asked a single question—to have made the least attempt to throw discredit on her testimony—would only have increased the public dislike.

But his object was to win for himself and for his client as much sympathy as possible, and that object was gained.

By the refusal to cross-examine, and by the utterance of that sentiment, he had ingratiated himself more than

he could possibly have done by any other means, and he cannot but be admired for the tact and management with which he had successfully achieved his end.

And though his cause appeared so hopeless, yet he by no means despaired of gaining the acquittal of his client, Adrian Winberry.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION MAKES AN APPEAL TO THE JUDGE FOR PROTECTION FOR HIS WITNESS, WHICH IS REFUSED HIM.

THE suggestion made by Mr. Nuttall to the effect that there should be a temporary suspension of the proceedings while the jury went to view the body, was immediately acted upon.

The corpse of the deceased Mr. William Winberry had been removed to the Sessions-house, Old Bailey, and placed in one of the ante-rooms adjoining the court.

Mr. Kersey was aware of this, and though he would fain have spared Maud Gouldman the additional horror of gazing upon the disfigured corpse, still the sacred cause of justice rendered it imperatively necessary.

Nerving herself, then, as well as she was able, to bear the revolting sight, she had, as she had stated in her evidence, entered the room and identified the body of the murdered man.

As soon as the jury had left their seats, Mr. Kersey made his way towards the witness-box, and, taking Maud by the hand, led her to an obscure seat.

The prisoners, too, were allowed to sit down, while in the body of the court there arose that hum and murmur which ever takes place upon such occasions.

All was confusion.

The jury, however, were not long absent.

They were satisfied with one glance at the ghastly and horrible form.

Then they turned away sickened and disgusted.

The foot, however, was shown to them, and its appearance entirely corresponded with the description which the fair witness had given of it.

Moreover, one of the jurymen, who by profession happened to be a surgeon, gave it to be his deliberate opinion that what they saw had been caused by a weight falling upon it and crushing it.

This, then, was satisfactory in the extreme, so far as the identification of the body went, and this also established the connecting link between the two divisions of the counsel for the prosecution's address.

They then all returned to the court, and took their seats.

Silence was restored.

Mr. Kersey was next placed in the witness-box.

The facts he swore to were unimportant, but still corroborative of what had been stated in connexion with him.

The counsel for the defence was asked whether he wished to put any questions to this witness, and he replied in the negative.

Then there was a pause.

The judge spoke.

"Is this the case for the prosecution?"

Mr. Nuttall rose.

There was something he wished to say, but he did not know how to give it utterance.

"It is, and it is not, my lord."

"What do you mean?"

"This, my lord. If you consider the evidence we have adduced sufficiently conclusive to substantiate the charge against the prisoners at the bar, the case is ended: but if we should be of a contrary opinion, and think the evidence not sufficient to support the accusation, we have another witness to call."

"This is something very extraordinary. I am not in a position to express an opinion. I should be taking the function out of the hands of the jury. Why not call this witness at once?"

"My lord, I wish sincerely that I could, because the evidence that he would give would be so much to the point, and so terribly conclusive, inasmuch as he was positively a spectator of the murder of which the three prisoners at the bar stand accused."

This announcement, which Mr. Nuttall uttered in a

loud, clear, and distinct voice, created a profound sensation in the court.

The counsel for the defence looked doubtful and anxious, though he was on the watch to lay hold of any circumstance that might take place.

But as for the three prisoners, they were the most affected by this speech.

It was easy to see that the self-possession which they had hitherto preserved forsook them, and Adrian Winberry, turning ghastly pale, grasped the front of the dock with a nervous grip.

Who was this witness? he asked himself.

Who was in that foot-forsaken place at the same time as he was.

What invisible eye had witnessed the foul murder?

These were the questions which succeeded each other with lightning rapidity in Adrian's mind.

But all those questions, terribly and vitally important as they were, were unanswerable.

With straining eyes and bated breath, he glared at the counsel for the prosecution, anxious to catch the next words which came from his lips.

"This, then," said the judge, "is an all-important and indispensable witness. Why do you hesitate to call him?"

"My lord, there are cogent reasons for it. Chance alone—Providence—call it what you will, caused his presence in the haunted house when the murder was committed. But he was there, and an unsuspected witness of the murder which was perpetrated."

"Then why did he not come forward on the inquest? This conduct, you will find, will have the effect of throwing discredit on his evidence."

"I trust it will not, my lord, when you hear the reason of his non-appearance."

"What is that reason?"

"Personal danger."

"Personal danger!" repeated the judge, in accents of the utmost surprise. Believe me, I am curious in the extreme to know what personal danger a witness can incur in coming into court to give his evidence."

"My lord, he does incur very great personal danger. It was hoped that he would be spared the necessity of coming forward. That hope, however, which was a frail one, has turned out fallacious."

"Be good enough to come to the point, brother Nuttall."

"I will, my lord. Do you think that the personal attendance of this witness could be avoided?"

"Certainly not."

"I am sorry to hear you say as much, my lord. I thought if he put down in writing what he had seen, and swore to it before witnesses, that the reading of such a document would enable you to dispense with his appearance."

"It might under some conditions, perhaps, but decidedly not where so grave a charge as the present is at stake. It would be most prejudicial to admit written evidence of such a kind."

"I am in duty bound to bow to your decision, my lord."

"What is the nature of the personal danger which the witness will incur by stepping into the witness-box?"

"Capture by the police, my lord."

"Ahem. That is awkward. Why is he liable to capture?"

"He is liable to a charge of felony."

"Oh! indeed."

"That is precisely the case, my lord; or rather, to have it full, thus. The witness of whom I speak, being pursued by the police, took refuge from them in the haunted house, which has to-day so frequently been made mention of. While hiding there he saw the three prisoners enter, and also saw the murder committed. Then, as Purford, the officer, has related, he broke in; and this witness was again compelled to fly for his life, and only escaped capture by making his way over the honsetops, to the imminent hazard of his life."

The judge glared at Mr. Nuttall while he made this statement, and, not knowing what else to say, uttered his former ejaculation of—

"Oh! indeed."

Mr. Nuttall held up a small folded paper.

"I have here," he said, "in writing, and sworn to in the presence of two witnesses, an account of what the

person witnessed, to whom I have alluded; and as he cannot make his appearance without exposing himself to the certain risk of capture, I think your lordship would not be doing wrong in permitting this document to be read as evidence."

Before the judge could reply, the counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"Pardon me, my lord, one moment," he said. I have not spoken before, because I wished to see how far my learned friend for the prosecution would go in this matter. Surely, my lord, you will not do my client—of whose perfect and entire innocence I feel convinced—I say you will not do him such an injustice, nor establish in this court so dangerous a precedent, as to receive the written evidence of a witness who dares not come forward. The mischief that would hereafter ensue is incalculable."

"I beg your pardon," said the counsel for the prosecution, "the witness of whom I speak does dare to come forward; but, as he perils his liberty by doing so, it was wished to try whether it cannot be dispensed with. My lord, I wait for your decision."

"Has this man been guilty of many serious crimes?"

"He has not been tried and found guilty of any, though several have been laid to his charge."

"Is there a warrant out against him authorising his apprehension?"

"I believe so, my lord."

"It appears to me that the evidence you say it lies in his power to give is indispensable, and such as no other person can give?"

"Just so, my lord."

"It is very awkward."

"My lord, I have yet another proposition to make to you. If this document cannot be received as evidence, would you throw the shield of your protection round this witness, and prevent his capture?"

"I fear I have no power. My jurisdiction is confined within the four walls of this court."

"But, my lord, if this man comes here voluntarily in the cause of justice, and at the peril of his own liberty, surely, I should think, he ought to be protected."

"You say he will come forward?"

"Yes, my lord; he is in the court at the present moment awaiting your decision."

There was a visible commotion all over the court, caused by each person looking earnestly and eagerly into the face of his neighbour.

Dick did not shrink back and strive to avoid detection. Such a course would, he knew, immediately ensure detection, so he assumed as much curiosity as those who happened to be standing near him, and who returned his gaze without suspecting him to be the person alluded to.

"My decision is this," said the judge. "If the witness chooses to come forward and give his testimony, it will be entirely at his own risk—I am powerless to protect him. Still, should he be captured here, the circumstances under which the capture took place will doubtless have the effect of mitigating the rigour of his punishment."

Mr. Nuttall shook his head.

"That is poor encouragement. Still, I cannot help your decision. Of its justice I do not say a word. The witness is here, and has overheard all that has passed. If he likes to step into the witness-box he can. If he does, the punishment of the guilty must follow, and it appears to me his capture also. The risk is to be run. He can come forward or not, just as he may think proper. Only I think he ought to be warned what will be the result."

"If a warrant is out against him," said the judge, "I cannot interpose between him and the officers of justice."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

DICK TURPIN, AT ALL RISKS, ENTERS THE WITNESS-BOX, AND IS RECOGNISED BY MR. WRIGGLES.

A STRANGE hushed silence followed this decision, which was enunciated in a low tone, yet with extreme distinctness.

It will be seen that this last speech of Mr. Nuttall's was intended entirely for the edification of Dick Turpin, so that he should not come forward in ignorance of what would be the consequence.

There was little very tempting in it, and Dick asked himself the question whether he should be justified in throwing away his life—for it would be doing nothing less

for one chief good of some one he had never seen—namely, Blanche Winberry.

His eyes roamed round the court after the counsel had spoken, and they rested upon the countenance of Maud Gouldman.

That decided him.

She did not perceive his glance; her attention was rivetted upon the judge and Mr. Nuttall.

But that one glance decided Dick.

Drawing his cloak close up to his chin, he moved aside those who were before him, and strode in a direct line towards the witness-box.

The movement of this one cloaked figure from among the mass attracted immediate attention.

All eyes were fixed upon it.

Those who could not see so well rose up and craned their necks over the heads of those who sat before them.

A lane was opened.

Every one stood aside.

Seeing this, Dick availed himself of it to make all speed possible, and then, not without a strange fluttering at his heart, which he tried in vain to subdue, he stood within the witness-box.

He held his hat in his hand.

The lower part of his face, however, was covered with his cloak.

A faint cry came from the lips of Maud Gouldman as she saw him, and she said:

"No, no, it must not be—the sacrifice is too great."

"Nay," replied Dick, "I am here."

The full, rich tones of his voice penetrated like music into the utmost recesses of the court.

The curiosity of all persons received a fresh addition, and no small degree of attention was directed to Maud, who, covering her face with her handkerchief, shrunk back from the public scrutiny.

It would be hard to say who looked at Dick with the greatest amount of eagerness.

Adrian Winberry glared at the cloaked and unrevealed character which was to utter such conclusive and condemnatory evidence against him.

The judge was the first to recover himself.

Looking at Mr. Nuttall, he said:

"Is this the witness of whom you spoke?"

"It is, my lord. You see, despite the warning words I uttered for his special behoof, he has, of his own free will, made his way into the witness-box. He knows the penalty of what he has done, but he is there to further the ends of justice, and take the responsibility of his own actions."

"Then," said the judge, with some degree of fervour, "be he whom he may, such behaviour is in the highest degree praiseworthy and commendable."

Dick bowed deeply in reply to this complimentary speech.

"Let the witness reveal himself," added the judge.

"One moment, my lord," said Mr. Nuttall. "Ere it be too late, let me make a last appeal, that as he has come forward in the manner you have seen, you will screen him from the consequences."

"I have already said it does not lie within my power. If it did, I should only be too glad to act in the manner you request."

"There is no resource, then. Witness, are you willing to reveal yourself?"

Dick made no reply by words.

He released his cloak, which he held around him with one hand only, and it fell flutteringly to his feet.

He drew himself proudly up to his full height, and stood exposed to the gaze of all.

But there was no sudden cry of recognition, as he had more than half suspected.

The book was handed to him, and the customary oath proposed.

It was taken.

Then was propounded the first and vitally important question:

"What is your name?"

A breathless silence followed the utterance of this query.

A silence that was positively painful.

Dick once more glanced around him.

Then he said, quietly:

"John Palmer."

Scarcely had the words passed his lips, than a man near the door of the court gesticulated furiously, and cried:

"False—false! A thousand pounds reward! I claim it! False—false! That is not John Palmer, but Dick Turpin, the highwayman! Seize him! seize him!"

The scene of confusion that now ensued is perfectly indescribable.

As if by magic the interior of the court was converted into Bedlam.

For a long time all attempts to restore order were in vain.

The judge stood up.

"Clear the court!" he cried, "clear the court! Am I to be insulted in this manner? Clear the court!"

These words had the effect of restoring silence.

"Where is the man who cried out just now?" exclaimed the judge, as soon as he could make his voice heard. "Bring him before me! Where is he?"

"It is me, my lord. Here I am," said a voice, and some one struggled forward to the centre of the court.

Dick knew him at a glance.

It was his old foe, Mr. Wriggles.

Now the judge, when he saw this man was a police-officer, was not so wrathful, still he demanded what he meant by breaking the peace of the court.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Mr. Wriggles, "but that man in the witness-box is no other than the notorious and desperate highwayman, Dick Turpin, and for whose apprehension I have a warrant now in my possession. May I seize him, my lord?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Officer, certainly not. He stands here in the sacred position of a witness on the side of truth, and as such he is entitled to protection, at all events until he leaves the place where he now is, after which I have no power to prevent you from exercising the duties of your office upon him."

The former part of the speech was greeted with applause by the spectators of the court, but the latter portion with loud expressions of disapproval.

It was easy to see that Dick was a favourite, and that the popular feeling was entirely on his side.

He bowed several times to the mass of people during the manifestation of their suffrage.

This appeared to give them unqualified delight, while abuse of all kinds was levelled at the head of Mr. Wriggles; nor could silence be obtained until they set about clearing the court.

The desire to hear the rest of the remarkable proceedings, which had now reached their most interesting point, triumphed over every other consideration, and seeing the officials fully in earnest, they suddenly became as quiet as mice.

Mr. Wriggles gradually worked his way to the witness-box, until he got so close that he could, by reaching out his arm, have touched Dick Turpin, had he been so minded. There was an exultant grin upon his features. He had entered the court, still smarting under the defeat he had just experienced, and wondering how he should get the highwayman in his clutches, when suddenly he appeared before his very eyes.

And now this interruption and excitement over, the business of the court resumed its ordinary manner.

The judge himself addressed our hero.

"It appears, then, that you are the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin. I can now understand your reluctance to coming forward as a witness; and that you should do so at all risks fills me with admiration."

Dick bowed.

"I am not afraid to say that this is the first time such a thing has occurred," continued the judge, who could not overcome his surprise; and I am scarcely able to believe it. However, not to take up the time of the court, for this case has been prolonged for a considerable length, be good enough to state what you know about this transaction. Speak freely and fully."

There was an intense desire to catch the first words from the highwayman's lips.

"My lord," he began, in a calm voice, and not like one who stood in so perilous a position. "My lord, as you have already been told in court, I wrote down the whole of the particulars of this business, so far as I was concerned in it."

"Yes, we have had that stated already by the counsel for the prosecution."

"I was about to ask whether you would permit me to have that paper to refer to, so that I shall not make any mistake, or omit any detail. It was written with great care and attention."

The counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"My lord," he said, "will you have the kindness to inform me whether it is your intention to receive what this man says as evidence?"

"Assuredly."

"Then, my lord—pardon me for my boldness in saying so—I consider you have decided very improperly."

"Sir!"

"Pardon me, my lord, but this man is a common felon—his life is forfeit to the hangman; besides, I accuse him of being the perpetrator of this foul murder."

"You are slightly in error, I think, brother," said the judge, calmly. "You wish to throw discredit on what this man is about to say."

"I consider he ought not to be believed upon his oath, my lord."

"And I am of an entirely different opinion. The very fact of his forfeiting his liberty, and consequently his life in the manner that he has, is sufficient proof, I should think, that he comes here on the side of truth and justice."

A loud cheer from the spectators greeted this speech, but it was immediately checked by the criers.

"I shall certainly hear what this man has to say," said the judge, "and shall note carefully how what he says corresponds with the evidence which has formerly been given."

"Shall I hand him the paper for which he asked?" inquired the counsel for the prosecution.

"No; give it to me. I will myself peruse it, and question him from it, which will be imposing a severer test."

In accordance with this determination, the paper was handed to the judge, who looked at it for some moments in silence.

The substance of it seemed quite satisfactory, so he turned round to Dick and prepared to question him.

As he did so there was upon his face too plain an expression of interest and compassion to be mistaken.

Seeing what was going to follow, it must of necessity be full of interest. There once more reigned in that court the death-like and oppressive silence which had more than twice marked the day's proceedings.

CHAPTER CCLXXXIV.

DICK TURPIN GIVES HIS EVIDENCE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY, AND SWEARS TO THE IDENTITY BOTH OF HIM AND HIS ACCOMPLICES.

"On a certain night," said the judge, "you, Richard Curpin, the highwayman, were pursued by the police, and took refuge in St. James's-park. Is that so?"

"It is, my lord," replied Dick.

"After you had gained the inclosure, be good enough to relate what took place."

"My foes were hard upon my track, and I ran across the Mall, which brought me to the palings protecting the inclosure containing the piece of ornamental water. I had previously sprained my ankle, and I suffered acute pain. I intended to climb over these palings, but owing to the pain, I was not able to do it at the first trial."

"Go on; that exactly corresponds with what is set down here."

"While standing here to recover myself, I heard the loud blast of a bugle somewhere within the park, which was presently answered by another on my right, another on my left, and another before me."

"Just so. Please continue. These are minor particulars, but still they may turn out to be of importance as the evidence proceeds. What next?"

"I was at a loss to think what this meant, until the thought occurred to me that my foes, knowing I was somewhere in the park, had communicated with the soldiers who guarded the various exits from the park, for them to allow no person to pass out."

"Precisely."

"Having come to this conclusion, I succeeded in

climbing over the palings, and made my way to the ornamental water. To have gone round it would have taken me too much time, so I swam across it."

"Yes, Proceed, so far you are quite right according to the paper."

"Upon reaching the opposite bank, I felt I had a few minutes' rest and reflection left me, so I paused, and thought what means I should adopt to get out of the park. I then all at once remembered that one of the row of houses which are in Birdoage-walk was shut up and deserted, being haunted. To this I determined to make my way, and try and effect an entrance to it, for I feared my foes more than apparitions."

"Go on."

"Having taken this resolution, I made my way with all speed to my destination, and, as the distance is not great, I reached it in a few moments. My desperate emergency lent me strength, and I mounted those palings also, and dropped into the garden of the haunted house, for such it has all along been called."

"I need not describe all the difficulties I encountered in seeking to effect an entrance to this deserted mansion. Let it suffice I entered through the door leading into the lower kitchen."

"From this last-named place I made my way up to the floor above, which was, of course, the ground-floor of the mansion."

"The whole place was intensely silent, and the only thing that can be compared to its silence is its profound darkness."

"Upon reaching the entrance-hall I could, by the aid of the faint light over the front door and the two narrow windows which were upon either side of it, see tolerably well about me."

"On my left hand, as I stood facing the front door, was a flight of stairs very noble in their appearance and with richly-carved balusters."

"I had now to consider what should be my next step to escape, so I determined to ascend the stairs, and try and find (if I could) some hiding-place above."

Dick paused for breath.

"Go on," said the judge. "You are quite right so far."

"I ascended the stairs, then, but before I reached the first turn in the staircase, I heard a slight sound which in the stillness of that empty house sounded like a loud one."

"At first I did not know what produced it, but I soon remembered it was a key rattling in a lock, as though some one was rather impatient about unfasting it."

"This, considering the reputation of the house, was a strange and suspicious occurrence, so I crouched down upon the stairs to see what was about to take place."

"I was not kept long in suspense, for the door was thrown open and three men entered."

"Will you swear distinctly that you saw three men?"

"I will, my lord; for, having entered and closed the door behind, one called for a light, and immediately a dark lantern was produced. By the aid of this I saw them, though not so distinctly as I did afterwards. One, however, (he who had called for a light), wore upon his head a large felt hat with slouching brim and a long black cloak muffled up in his neck."

"You saw that?"

"Yes, but more distinctly a little while after, as I will relate to your lordship."

"Go on, then."

"As you may suppose, my lord, I felt so much interest in this stealthy visit at the hour of midnight—for, as I take it, it was somewhere about that time—that I forgot to a great extent my own danger, and the occasion of my presence in that house, and became quite absorbed in watching their actions."

"I was well hidden where I was, and thought I should not have to move, but in this I was mistaken, for the three men came directly towards the stairs, and commenced ascending them."

"This, of course, necessitated a change of position, and therefore, I silently ascended the stairs before them, and did not pause until they stopped upon the second landing."

"Here there was a massive-looking door, and it was before this they all halted."

"I presume," said the judge, "from the position you occupied upon the lower portion of the third flight of



[MR. CAWTHORN IN TRIUMPH ESCORTS DICK TURPIN TO THE NEWGATE CELL.]

stairs, you had a full view of the door of the room in question?"—"I had, my lord."

"Continue your narrative."

"The one in the cloak pushed aside his cloak and felt for the key which he presently produced. I mention the displacement of the cloak because I then saw the clothing beneath it, which was of a rich and costly material, and such as would be worn by gentlemen."

"Did you see the face of the person who wore the cloak?"

"I saw the lower portion of it, my lord, as he stooped down and fitted the key into the lock. The beams of the dark lantern, which one of the others carried, fell full upon it."

"Now look carefully at the prisoners, at the bar, and tell me whether you recognise either of them as the person you saw fitting the key into the lock of the door?"

"My lord, the one standing furthest from me, with his hand clutching the front of the dook, is the one. He has made some changes in his personal appearance, but I

can swear to him, for all that. I saw him so distinctly, not only at the time now referred to, but afterwards."

"In what respect has he changed his appearance?"

"My lord, you now see him with his face smooth-shaven. When I saw him he wore a profusion of hair upon the lower part of it."

"That will do, and now continue your narrative, which, up to the present time, you have given with remarkable clearness and accuracy, so far as corresponding with this document goes. The principal, and by far the most important portion of your evidence, I see, remains to be given, but do not be hasty. Let us have the whole straightforward."

"I will try my best, my lord. I left off where I stood watching them fit the key into the lock. The door was opened, and the moment it was I heard some one within the room into which it led utter some words in a shrill and shrieking tone of voice, and so strained was it that I could not tell at first whether it was a man or whether it was a woman who spoke."

"What was the purport of those words?"

"That, my lord, I can hardly tell you, they were so disjointed and incoherent; but they were to the effect that he would not listen or be persuaded to do something."

"And you do not recollect any of them?"

"No, my lord."

"Continue, then."

"The one in the cloak bade those with him to enter, saying, at the same time, he would follow. All three passed into the room, the door of which they left ajar."

"Immediately upon their entrance the shrieks ceased, and I, more curious than before, stole down the stairs, and stood close to the partially open door."

"From where I stood I could not see into the interior of the room, but I could hear every word that was said. The exact words I cannot remember, but the substance of what was said is this. The tall man in the cloak, who I could recognise by the deep and peculiar tones of his voice, was endeavouring, by threats and persuasions, to induce some one to sign a deed transferring his property to him."

"Stop a moment," said the judge. "You swear that is the substance of what passed?"

"I do, my lord."

"I will make a note of it, then."

"The person to whom he addressed himself, and who appeared to be kept in this room as a kind of prisoner, refused to accede to what was demanded of him, but the argument that the one in the cloak brought forward oftenest, and laid the most stress upon was this. If he would sign the deed, his daughter should be restored to him. He also agreed to leave sufficient to keep them both in comfort, provided he would sign the deed."

"Was the name of this daughter mentioned?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What was it?"

"Blanche."

"Indeed! This affair grows blacker and blacker. And was this daughter Blanche spoken of by the one in the cloak as being in his power?"

"She was, my lord; and he also held out threats as to what her fate should be if he refused to do as he required."

"What next?"

"Some harsh recriminating words followed, in the course of which things which had happened in the past were referred to. This conversation led me to know that the one in the cloak and the person to whom he addressed himself were brothers—or rather half-brothers, being sons by the same fathers but different mothers."

"You could not repeat that conversation?"

"No, my lord, I cannot recollect it word for word, but what I have just said is what it all amounted to."

"Proceed, then."

"Up to this point, my lord, I had heard without seeing, but it occurred to me that if I made a change in my position, I should be able to see into the interior of the room, which would materially assist me to comprehend what was taking place."

"And could you see?"

"Yes, my lord; I moved, and then found I could see the chief actors in the interesting scene I had overheard."

"Be good enough to describe what you saw."

"My first ideas respecting it, my lord, were quite realized. The door led into an apartment, at one end of which, and full in my view, was seated in an old-fashioned chair an emaciated, white-headed old man."

"His arms were held down on either side of him by the two men, who kept a firm grasp upon them—for every moment the old man strove to rise from his seat, but each time they forced him back into it."

"Stow," said the judge; "I will make a note of that."

Himself and Dick, then, were the only speakers in the court, and had been so for some time.

As for the spectators, their first excitement over, they had sat mute and motionless, listening to the narrative which Dick related with breathless and feverish interest.

The reader is, of course, acquainted with it all from first to last, but it was deemed expedient to set down in this place the words exactly as they came from Dick Turpin's mouth, because the counsel for the defence afterwards cross-examined him upon many of the points upon which he spoke, being engaged all the time Dick was speaking in taking down his words in shorthand.

The judge finished his note, and turned over a fresh page.

"Now," he said, "I have written here, that from where you stood, you could see the men as they held the old man down in the chair. Is that right?"

"Quite right."

"Be careful, please, for this is a serious business."

"I am aware of it, my lord, and am relating to you just what I witnessed, and no more."

"Exactly; now tell me, could you see the faces of these two men?"

"I could, my lord; and their forms also."

"Indeed. Well, then, look at the prisoners at the bar attentively, and then tell the court whether you can see the two men who held the old man down in the chair."

The two accomplices of Adrian Winberry looked very uneasy upon hearing these words, and screwed up their faces so as to baffle Dick if they could.

But they failed in their attempt.

Like the police-officer, Pursford, who, in giving his evidence said that when he once saw a person he always knew them again, Dick had a remarkable memory of faces.

When he looked at the two men, then, he knew them instantly—for, of course, while he stood at the partially-open door, he had had an ample opportunity of studying their countenances.

"My lord," said Dick, "I am quite prepared to swear that those two men, who are standing nearest this way, are the same I saw in the haunted house, holding the old man down in the chair."

It was easy to see that these words, uttered as they were in a tone of firm and earnest conviction, produced a great effect on the jury.

"That is quite conclusive. Now relate what else you saw and heard."

"I will, my lord. The means by which I saw the old man and those who held him was afforded me by the dark lantern, which they had placed on the table with the door open, so that the light which it emitted was diffused, and not concentrated, as it would have been if the lens had been before the light."

"At first I did not see the one who wore the cloak. He was standing where the door had hid him from my view. Presently, however, he stepped forward, and I saw him as distinctly as either of the others, and that is the reason why I swore so positively to his identity before when you asked me."

"I will make a note of that," said the judge.

Several of the jury did likewise.

The judge, having finished his writing, looked up to Dick, who understood from the action that he was to continue.

"I saw him with a paper in his hand, which he spread out and put upon the table. From its general appearance, seeing it from the distance, I took it to be a deed. The one in the cloak rested one finger upon it, and renewed his solicitations to the other to sign it."

"Still the old man refused."

"As the conversation went on, I soon found that the conditions were that the old man should be released from his present place of confinement, his daughter Blanche be restored to him, and an annual income settled upon him if he would sign this deed, and transfer the whole of his wealth and property to him."

"But you say that this proposal was rejected?"

"Yes, my lord, for a long time; but at length he did consent. In order to be reunited to his daughter he sacrificed everything. With a hasty hand he seized the pen and affixed his signature to the document."

"Did you see him do it?"

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

DICK TURPIN IS CROSS-EXAMINED BY THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE.

Not a single word in the shape of interruption had been uttered from the time when Dick Turpin commenced to give his testimony.

From the mere fact of the judge having questioned him all through in the manner he did, it can be seen how deep an interest he felt in all that fell from his lips, and how much value he set upon what he said.

"I did not see him write his name, my lord. I was not near enough, but I saw him take the pen and write something rapidly."

"Yes, that is what I thought."

"My lord, I ought to tell you that I anticipated the perpetration of some atrocious treachery, and, could I have done so, I would have warned the old man not to sign. But I was powerless to interfere."

"What did you see next?"

"Scarcely had the old man finished making the few strokes with his pen, than the one in the cloak with great rapidity pulled a pistol from his apparel, and holding it against the old man's head, fired it."

A loud cry of irrepressible horror rose from all in court upon hearing the particulars of this cold-blooded assassination.

But, seeing the judge's lips move, all were again instantly silent.

"Did you not, then, seeing what was his intent, spring forward, and prevent the consummation of the murder?" asked the judge.

"My lord, I had no time. You could not have drawn breath between the time when the deed was signed and the pistol fired. Nevertheless, I started forward, and was about to dash into the room, when my footsteps were suddenly arrested."

"Arrested? How? By whom?"

"By a loud knocking at the front door. In a moment I thought of my pursuers, and the wish to preserve my own life and liberty rose superior to every other consideration."

"I understand."

"The sound of the blows told me that they were attacking the front door in good earnest, and that they would soon have it down. I felt sure, so, without further hesitation, I sprang up the flight of stairs leading to the third story, intending to make my escape by the roof. In this I succeeded, though not without great peril."

"And does that conclude your testimony in this case?"

"It does, my lord. Chance threw me in the way of those who were sufferers by the villainy I had witnessed. Without my testimony it was considered the guilty could not be convicted. At the same time, it was quite certain if I did come forward and state what I knew, it would be at the sacrifice of my life. However, I resolved for the sake of the family of the murdered man, to come forward at all risks, and I have done so, as you see. If you will believe me, it was not without the hope that when all the circumstances were known, I should be allowed to go forth unmolested. I am well aware that I stand charged with committing several offences against the laws, and that a warrant has for a long time been issued empowering my apprehension. Still, for all that, I trust that the evidence I have given will be received, and that the guilty will be punished, while I am allowed at least a chance for my life, for all know that I have perilled it voluntarily, and in a righteous cause."

There was a hum of applause in the court as Dick thus spoke.

He was popular with those who were assembled there, beyond all doubt, and he felt hopeful, for they might yet be able to render him assistance; for, from what the reader knows of Dick's character, he must be aware that he was not likely to submit tamely or give in easily.

But, if the truth must be told, Dick cherished in his heart the hope that some protection would be afforded him—that, in fact, he would be set free.

Whether this hope was doomed to realization or disappointment time only can determine.

"Silence!" cried the usher.

Then the judge spoke in answer to Dick's appeal.

"I have no power to protect you from the officers except while you are within the precincts of this court, during which time you will be regarded in the sacred light of a witness, and free from the grasp of any officer."

"I sincerely thank you, my lord. Have you any further questions to ask of me?"

"No, none; what you have said entirely corresponds with what is here set down. Perhaps, however, one of my learned friends may wish to put a few questions to you."

Both Mr Nuttall and the counsel for the defence rose instantly to their feet, but Mr. Nuttall, from the fact of

his being on the side of the prosecution, was allowed the precedence.

"I have nothing further to say just at present," he said, "though I may, perhaps, have occasion to recall you. You can stand down now so far as I am concerned."

"Wait a moment, please," cried the counsel for the defence, "wait a moment; if my learned friend has done with you, I have not."

Dick bowed, and a very perceptible hiss arose in the court somewhere.

"Turn that man out of court," said the judge.

But all were suddenly silent again, so the order was rather a difficult one to carry out.

The counsel took no notice; he was a man not very easily disconcerted, and went on with what he intended to say.

"Ahem! Mr. Dick—or, perhaps, I ought to say Mr. Richard Turpin—it appears to be quite admitted on all hands that your character is none of the best, doesn't it?"

"Bad or good," said Dick, "I would much rather stand here before my fellows in the capacity I do than appear as the accomplice of a murderer."

The counsel turned very red in the face and for a moment speech was denied him, so great was his rage.

The audience applauded.

"My lord," he cried, "my lord, I must request you to call the witness to order."

"I consider," said the judge, "that you fully deserve what you have got."

"Hear! hear!" said a voice, and the judge issued no order for the speaker to be turned out of court, but continued—

"If you had begun to cross-examine the witness properly, he would not have replied to you in the manner he did. I questioned him, and he treated me with no rudeness. My learned brother overlooks the circumstances of the case. You should bear in mind, not that he is an offender against the laws, but as one who has nobly—for I can call it by no other name—one who has nobly come forward at the peril of his life to give evidence in the cause of truth."

A loud burst of applause followed this speech from the judge, and he made no attempt to suppress it until it became too boisterous.

The time that elapsed, however, before order was obtained, permitted the counsel for the defence to recover himself from the confusion into which he had been thrown.

But he resolved not to quit Dick, though he began questioning him in a far different tone and manner than he did before, though there was a good deal unpleasant in it.

"I have some notes here," he said, "a few notes that I took down while you were giving your evidence just now, and I wish to ask you a few questions respecting them, in order that this matter may be cleared up a little. Yours is a very plausible and well got-up story, but we are not going to take all you say for gospel, Mr. Turpin, if you are a highwayman, and a witness on the peril of your life."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVI.

IN WHICH THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE COMMENCES HIS ADDRESS TO THE JURY, AND MAKES THINGS LOOK VERY BLACK AGAINST DICK.

DICK TURPIN did not condescend to make any reply to this offensive speech, but looked up at the ceiling attentively.

However, the counsel for the defence had the good sense to take no notice of it, and he at once asked the question to which he had made such obscure allusion.

"You say that on the night in question you were in St. James's-park?"

"I was," replied Dick.

"Why were you there?"

"I have already stated that I took refuge in that place from my pursuers."

"Very good; and after that you made your way into the haunted house?"

"Just so."

"Just so! Well now, Mr. Highwayman Turpin—you

are on your oath, please to bear in mind—personally, I have no doubt you attach but small importance to that little circumstance, but I take occasion to remind you of it, nevertheless."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble. The 'little circumstance' has not escaped my memory. I am here to speak the truth, and I will speak it without the slightest reservation."

"I hope you will," said the undaunted counsel; "because that will make matters so much simpler. Begin at once, then, by confessing that you were the person seen by Pursford, the officer, wearing the long cloak and accompanied by two companions, enter the haunted house."

"Who? I?" said Dick, staggered for a moment by the question. "Certainly not. I most indignantly deny it."

"I thought so. I knew how far your confessions go. You are determined to put me to the trouble of proving it, I see."

"You will have a great deal of trouble to prove it, it strikes me," said Dick.

"I shall do it," said the counsel; "not by attempting, in the course of a cross-examination, to entrap you into making a wrong answer. I feel you have got your tale too well conned over for that, so you can stand down now, so far as I am concerned, until you are wanted again."

Hearing this, Dick gladly enough descended from the witness box.

Upon reaching the floor of the court, however, he found his old foe, Mr. Wiggles, standing in disagreeable proximity to him, and the officer nodded and winked in a satisfied manner, as much as to say, "I have got you safe at last."

There was a pause.

Mr. Nuttall turned over his papers anxiously.

He could see that the battle was not won, and that he should have a great deal of trouble in achieving the victory.

"Does this terminate the case for the prosecution?" asked the judge.

"It does, my lord."

The judge looked across to the counsel for the defence, who was busy with his papers.

Seeing him not prepared, he rose and retired to an adjoining room for refreshment.

Only a partial silence was reserved after his departure.

The jury bent down their heads, and talked earnestly together.

This state of things continued for about ten minutes. Then the judge resumed his seat upon the bench.

The counsel for the defence rose.

Amid a profound stillness, which was caused by the universally felt desire to know what he said, he commenced his address in the following terms—

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"When my learned brother for the prosecution, commenced the delivery of his address to you, he spoke of the present case as being one of the most remarkable that had ever fallen under his notice.

"Without arrogating too much to myself, for, of course, I have not had the lengthened experience which my learned brother has enjoyed, I think he would not have gone too far if he had styled it the most remarkable in all the annals of criminal jurisprudence.

"The time occupied already has been immense, yet reluctantly enough I say it, we have not got half way through the more simple part of this difficult business.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I am here to-day as the advocate for the cause of Adrian Winberry, now standing at the bar of this court.

"I have been deputed to rebut the charges brought against him, and this is the defence.

"My client distinctly and emphatically pleads three things.

"Firstly, that he is innocent of the crime of which he stands accused.

"Secondly, that he was never in the so-often-mentioned house in the Birdcage-walk in his life.

"Thirdly, that he never had any dealings with the men who stand beside him, and that the first time he saw them was in the vestibule of Newgate, to which place he had been taken prisoner by mistake, for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"Now, gentlemen of the jury, while perpending upon

these three several and distinct denials, let me draw your attention to one important fact.

"I allude to the words which terminated the third negation—

"My client was taken to the vestibule of Newgate in mistake for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"Now, who was it made the mistake?

The officers?

"Now, in the evidence for the prosecution it was stated with particular emphasis, by the witness Pursford, that when the two men who had been captured in the haunted house were brought into the vestibule of Newgate (which happened while my client was there), I say the witness Pursford stated that mutual recognition took place between them.

"This I deny.

"When the two prisoners, who were undoubtedly captured in the haunted house, were brought in, they appeared to recognise my client.

"But that was in consequence of an error.

"The prisoners took him for another person who it may be presumed he resembled, but upon a second look they acknowledged their mistake.

"From this it will appear that the recognition was all on one side.

"My client could not have recognised them, because he had never to his knowledge seen them in his life before.

"Now, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I will ask you what is the most natural deduction to be inferred from this?

"My client was mistaken for another person.

"First, by the officers.

"Secondly, the two men.

"This is strange.

"We know, from the evidence which has just been given, who it was that the police-officers mistook him for.

"It was for Dick Turpin, the highwayman.

"That they did fall into this mistake is certain.

"If they did so, it is easily supposed that the two men did the same, and that both made a precisely similar error.

"By their confession these two men declare that they were hired by an unknown person, for an unknown purpose.

"That person might have been Dick Turpin for the reasons I have just stated.

"But let the person be whom he might, he accosted these two men, and offered them a certain sum of money to accompany him; and they, having no idea that murder was intended, consented to receive it. When the officers broke in, which, as you have been told in evidence, was almost simultaneous with the firing of the pistol, they, having the example of their employer before them, and the consequences in view, overcome with horror, attempted to escape, but were captured in the attempt.

"So far, then, gentlemen of the jury, such is the true state of affairs, and I wish in the next place to explain the presence of my client in the park at the time mentioned when he was mistaken for the murderer, and under that impression conveyed to Newgate.

"I shall bring before you in evidence a witness who will prove to your satisfaction that on the night in question, and at the time spoken of, Mr. Winberry was at his house in Birdcage-walk, and having transacted some business together, Mr. Winberry, wishing to make his way as quickly as possible to Charing-cross, was let out by a gate leading into St. James's-park, and when last seen was crossing the enclosure in the direction of Spring-gardens.

"Upon reaching this gate, however, in consequence of the order which had been issued to the soldiers on guard, he was stopped, and, in spite of all his protestations, carried off to Newgate, where he has remained until the present moment.

"Such, gentlemen of the jury, is a simple statement of the whole case, and I trust that when you have heard the evidence which I shall bring forward, you will find my client innocent, and give your verdict accordingly.

"In conclusion, I would wish to remind you of the strange manner in which the highwayman, Dick Turpin, is mixed up in the business.

"He first comes before you as a witness for the prosecution.

"Then it appears that he was in the haunted house.

"A mutual mistake was made.

"My client was taken for Dick Turpin by the officers of police."

"He was taken to be the individual who had employed the two men to go with him to the haunted house."

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, it is while asking you to bear these things well in mind that I call upon my first witness, Mr. Josiah Skinner."

Dick started.

He recollected the name.

There was another person, then, more intimately mixed up in the plot than he had at first imagined.

The witness called was the rascally attorney, to whom he had caused to be administered such a well-merited punishment.

Mr. Kersey, too, who was acquainted with all the particulars concerning him, likewise remembered who he was, and hastily wrote down something on a slip of paper, which he handed to Mr. Nuttall, who perused it, and nodded his head.

"Mr. Josiah Skinner," cried the usher of the court.

In reply to this call, the attorney stepped forward, and entered the witness-box.

Upon the book being presented to him to kiss, after he had taken the oath, he smacked his lips loudly, in order that no one in the court should make any mistake about his not having kissed the book.

The counsel for the defence began his examination by asking the apparently useless question—

"What is your name?"

"Josiah Skinner."

"Very good. Where do you reside?"

"I have apartments on the ground-floor of a house, the back windows of which overlook St. James's-park."

"Is the house situated in the Birdcage-walk?"

"I believe that is what it is called."

"Just so. Have you a door through which you can gain access to the park if you wish it?"

"Yes; there is a gate in some pailings which divide the garden at the back of the house from the park."

"Very good, Mr. Skinner. Now, look at the prisoners at the bar."

Mr. Skinner did so.

"Do you know either of them?"

"Certainly."

"Which one?"

"The one standing furthest from me."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. Adrian Winberry."

"Very good, again, Mr. Skinner; so far that is quite satisfactory. Now—please be careful—do you recollect when you last saw him?"

"Certainly I do. I recollect the occasion perfectly well."

"When was it?"

"On the twenty-seventh of the last month."

"Gentlemen of the jury, please pay attention to the date mentioned by this witness. The twenty-seventh of last month."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVII.

MR. NUTTALL MANAGES TO FIND SOME FLAWS IN MR. SKINNER'S EVIDENCE.

DICK TURPIN took note of the date as well as the jury.

How the case was to end in consequence of the re-criminatory defence set up by Adrian Winberry, was more than he could tell.

The twenty-seventh of the last month was, he knew well enough, the date when the murder was committed.

Was an *alibi* about to be proved?

Was he, after all the risk he had run in his effort to do good, to be convicted of a crime of which he was perfectly innocent?

It looked very much like it.

With a breathless interest he watched the unfolding of the schemes of the opposing counsel.

He knew not how far he would be involved in them.

Well might Dick Turpin tremble for his safety.

The defending counsel was a man who would stick at nothing.

"Mr. Skinner," he said, resuming his interrogation, "you say it was on the twenty-seventh of the last month when you last saw Mr. Winberry?"

"It was."

"Do you remember what time in the day it was?"

"No, I do not."

"You do not?"

"No, for a very simple reason."

"What reason?"

"It was not day at all."

"Oh!"

"It was night."

"This is quibbling, Mr. Skinner."

"No, no—not at all. I like to be exact."

"Just as you like, but please do not take up the time of the court unnecessarily."

"I will be careful not to do so, sir."

"Then it was at night when you last saw my client, Mr. Winberry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Late at night?"

"Yes, very late."

"Can you recollect the time?"

"Not exactly."

"That is a pity."

"I can form an idea."

"Let us have it, then."

"It was after midnight."

"After midnight?"

"Yes."

"Much after?"

"No, very little."

"How can you tell?"

"I remember hearing the clock at Westminster Abbey strike twelve."

"You swear that?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when you heard the clock strike?"

"At my house."

"And was Mr. Winberry with you?"

"Yes. He came to pay me a visit."

"Very good; and how long was it after the clock struck twelve that he left you?"

"Only a few minutes."

"Only a few minutes?"

"It might be a quarter of an hour."

"Well, say a quarter of an hour, then."

"When I heard the clock strike, I said to him"—

"Said to who?"

"Mr. Winberry, my visitor."

"Well, what did you say?"

"Something about it having struck twelve; and he said something in reply about his not knowing it was so late, and that he had an appointment at Charing-cross, and he feared if he did not make haste he should be late."

"What next?"

"He stayed chatting some moments, and then I suggested to him that his nearest way to Charing-cross would be across the park, and through Spring-gardens gate."

"Please to go on with your statement."

"He inquired how he could gain the park, and I told him there was a gate in my garden leading into it, and he agreed to avail himself of that means of egress; and he did so."

"And you have not seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"That is all you know about the matter?"

"It is, sir."

"Then you can stand down, without my learned friend for the prosecution wishes to put any question to you."

Mr. Skinner did not stop to hear the last part of this speech, but hurried out of the box.

He would fain have avoided a cross-examination, but Mr. Nuttall called him back.

"I won't keep you long, Mr. Skinner," said Mr. Nuttall, "as you appear to be in a hurry."

"I am in no hurry, sir, only I thought the evidence I gave was so simple, I was done with."

"Oh! the error is of no consequence. Now attend to me, if you please."

"Yes, sir."

"What is your profession?"

"Profession?"

"Yes—vocation, or what you please to call it—or are you one of those favoured few who are not dependent upon their exertions for their livelihood?"

"I am an attorney, sir."

"Oh! indeed. You did not mention that before, I think?"

"No, sir. I was not asking the question."
 "Have you known Mr. Adrian Winberry long?"
 "Not very long."
 "How long should you think?"
 "About four months, as nearly as I can remember."
 "Oh! indeed. Then I might say the acquaintance is quite recent?"

"Just as you please, sir."
 "And in what capacity did you become acquainted with Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"What do you mean, sir?"
 "Did you become acquainted with him as a client, or as a friend?"

"As a client."
 "Oh! as a client. What was the nature of the business that brought you together?"

"I decline to answer that question."

"Do you?"

"I do, most emphatically."

"Very well. I will not press it, being of no great importance, but will ask you another question. Was it a friendly or professional visit that Mr. Adrian Winberry paid you on the evening, or rather night, you referred to, while giving your evidence a little while ago?"

"A professional visit."

"Oh! indeed. But are you in the habit of transacting business at your house in Spring-gardens? I understood you to say that was your place of residence."

"So it is, sir; though I sometimes transact business there if it happens to be of a private, urgent, or important nature."

"Oh! indeed; then we may come to the conclusion, I suppose, that the business you had with Mr. Adrian Winberry may be classed under one of those heads?"

"It might, sir."

"Then, perhaps, you might tell us exactly under what head?"

"The business comprehended all three."

"Ah! It was private?"

"Yea."

"Urgent?"

"Yea."

"And important?"

"Very."

"Did any one else see Mr. Adrian Winberry at your house on the occasion referred to?"

"I think not."

"You think not. Can you not speak with certainty?"

"I do not know of anyone who saw them. We entered together. I have a latch-key, so that I can gain admittance at any hour."

"Oh! I see."

"Some one might have observed us. I am not prepared to swear that no one did."

"Oh! and did no one see his departure?"

"No one but myself, for I took him, as I told you, to the little gate in the pailings, and I soon lost sight of him in the darkness of the park."

"And that is the last time you saw him?"

"Yea."

"You are quite sure you have not seen him since that time until you were brought face to face with him in the court to-day?"

"No."

"No! What do you mean by no? Have you seen him since?"

"Yea."

"Why, you have twice distinctly sworn that you have not. Let me remind you to be careful, Mr. Skinner; you are on your oath."

"I saw the prisoner at the inquest. I thought you meant the last time I saw him to have any dealings with him."

"Oh! Now, Mr. Skinner, please to refresh your memory. Are you prepared to swear that you have never seen him either between his visit to your house on the twenty-seventh of the last month and the inquest, or between the inquest and his appearance here this morning?"

Mr. Skinner shifted about uneasily, and hesitated.

The whole of his evidence, from beginning to end, was a tissue of falsehoods, and he began to tremble, for, from the manner in which the last few questions were put, he suspected that something was known.

Therefore, and from that sole cause, he hesitated to reply in the affirmative, lest he should immediately be detected in his perjury.

"Answer me!" said Mr. Nuttall, in a tremendous voice. "Answer me without hesitation or prevarication. You are on your oath. Have you, or have you not, seen the prisoner between the times I mentioned?"

"Once," replied Mr. Skinner.

"Oh! once since," said Mr. Nuttall, raising his voice to a still higher note. "Once since; and pray when was that?"

"I decline to answer."

"Decline to answer! That reply will not do, sir. I command you, answer my question."

"The counsel for the defence rose."

"My lord," he said, addressing the judge, "I must really appeal to you to interpose between my learned friend and the witness."

"Interpose!" said the judge. "Wherefore, I should like to know?"

"He is using intimidation, and trying to frighten replies out of him."

"Nothing of the kind. I call upon the witness to reply at once to the question he has been asked, and I take this opportunity of warning him to be careful what he says. As it is, I do not know whether I ought not to commit him for wilful perjury, since it is plain to see he must have told an untruth somewhere."

Upon hearing these words from the judge, the defending counsel sat down, and Mr. Skinner turned biliously white, and trembled visibly.

"Answer my question," said Mr. Nuttall. "When did you see the prisoner at the bar?"

"After the inquest."

"Where?"

"In his cell in Newgate."

"In his cell in Newgate, eh? Now, under what pretence was it you visited him in his cell? Tell me that."

"It was under no pretence at all," said Mr. Skinner, plucking up a little courage. "I visited him as his legal adviser."

CHAPTER COLXXXVIII.

AN UNEXPECTED, BUT MOST IMPORTANT, WITNESS APPEARS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

MR. JOSIAH SKINNER, attorney-at-law, was making a sad bungle of his evidence, and up to the present time he had done Adrian Winberry more harm than good.

Mr. Nuttall saw that he had gained an advantage, and he improved upon it to the utmost.

"Dear me!" he said; "it is very singular that you should have done that, and then sworn positively that you had never seen him since the night of the twenty-seventh of last month, when he had an interview with you! Please be careful. Now, just be good enough to tell me the nature of the business you transacted with him."

"I have before said that I decline to answer that question."

"But I shall insist upon your answering, sir."

The counsel for the defence got up again.

"I object to that question, my lord."

"The witness must answer it, nevertheless," replied the judge. "I should not have decreed so had it not been for his tergiversation. He must give a clear account of all his dealings with Mr. Adrian Winberry."

The counsel sat down again, with a mortified, discomfited look upon his face.

Mr. Nuttall resumed—

"Now, Mr. Skinner, answer me this. Was not your business with your client in the first instance to draw up a transfer of all the Winberry property from his brother to him? Answer me, and don't take up the time of the court."

Mr. Skinner glared despairingly around him.

But stern immovable faces, with their eyes fixed upon him alone, met his gaze.

"Answer me, I say," said Mr. Nuttall, raising his voice till it became a shout, "and don't prevaricate."

"It was," said Mr. Skinner, in a feeble voice.

"I thought so," said Mr. Nuttall, triumphantly. "Note, gentlemen of the jury," he added, "first the tergiversation of this witness, and then the collusion between him and the prisoner at the bar."

"And did you make out this deed of transfer?"

"I did."

"And what were the conditions of the bond? Quick—tell me."

"The whole of the estates and personal wealth of Mr. William Winberry were to become Mr. Adrian Winberry's absolutely."

"And what was Mr. William Winberry to have in return for this transfer?"

"There was nothing mentioned."

"And when was the deed to take effect?"

"Upon the death of Mr. William Winberry."

"Oh! indeed. Upon his death? That looks very suspicious—most suspicious. That would make his death very advantageous to your client, would it not?"

Mr. Skinner was silent.

Mr. Nuttall did not press him for an answer, simply because an answer was needless.

He took up his examination at another point.

"Then, Mr. Skinner, I understand you to say that you visited your client in his cell in Newgate in the capacity of his legal adviser?"

"I did, sir."

"Well, then, after that interview, will you swear that you did not go down to the residence of Mr. William Winberry, and try to make an abatement into it?"

"I went down to take possession of the property in his name."

"Oh! then, Mr. William Winberry must have been known by you to be dead, or else the step you took would not have been a legal one."

"I was informed he was dead."

"By whom?"

"By my client."

"While he was in Newgate?"

"Yes."

"How did he know it?"

"It is not in my power to answer that question, for I don't know."

"Who would convey the information to him while he was in his cell?"

"I cannot tell."

"Yes, you can; you know very well no one did."

"I don't."

"No one would be permitted, so I think it only fair to infer that your client knew of his brother's death before he was incarcerated in Newgate; don't you?"

"I am not bound to tell you what I think."

"But you are bound to depose to facts. Now, answer me this."

"What, sir?"

"When you saw your client in the cell, and he empowered you to go down and take possession of the property for him, what authority did he give you for doing his commands?"

"He showed me the deed."

"The transfer-deed?"

"Yes."

"I think you said you had drawn up that deed?"

"I might have said so."

"Then, of course, you knew it was all right—I mean without a flaw, or anything of that sort?"

"I might."

"We want positive replies here, Mr. Skinner, not conditional ones. Please bear that in mind."

"You say your client showed you the transfer-deed, which had been properly drawn up by yourself, and which was quite free from all flaws?"

"Yes," said Mr. Skinner, faintly.

"Was the deed signed?"

"It was, sir."

"By William Winberry?"

"By William Winberry."

"Did you see the signature?"

"Yes."

"Did you examine it?"

"No."

"No."

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Winberry's writing?"

"No."

"But you saw the deed properly signed, and did not hesitate to go down according to your client's instructions, to take possession of the property?"

"Certainly not. Such a proceeding was quite legitimate."

"Did you take possession then?"

"No."

"No? How was that, when you were armed with such powers?"

"I had been told"—

Mr. Skinner checked himself, but Mr. Nuttall insisted upon his completing the sentence he had begun.

"I was told that the only person in charge of the property was a young girl."

"Well?"

"But when I got there"—

"Go on."

"I found she had got a sweetheart, or somebody hidden in the room, and"—

"And what, Mr. Skinner?"

"He interfered, and would not allow me to take possession."

"Oh! indeed. And pray how did he interfere?"

"In a very bullying manner."

"And how was it he prevented you from taking possession?"

"He used force."

"Describe the nature of it."

"He used force."

"Did he not call the servants to his assistance?"

"Yes, he did."

"And did they not carry you out into the yard, and put you in the trough, and pump on you till their arms ached, for the insulting manner in which you behaved to the young lady?"

Mr. Skinner was silent.

"And did they not horsewhip you off the grounds for your rascally behaviour, and dare you ever to show your face there again, under pain of being subjected to the same punishment?"

Mr. Skinner was silent still.

"Of course they did, and you know it, and you also know that you fully deserved what you got. And now, in the next place, where is the deed about which so much has been said? Where is it? Produce it."

"My lord," said Mr. Skinner to the judge, imploringly; "you will not compel me to give up the deed?"

"Certainly," said the judge, who seemed to see through Mr. Skinner's lies and subtleties without much trouble.

"Hand it over to me at once."

Mr. Skinner would have refused if he had dared, but he had not the courage to do so, and he knew the consequences too well to think of defying a judge on the bench.

Therefore, with an ominous groan, which echoed through the court, he drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a small parcel tied up with red tape, which he surrendered into the hands of the usher with another groan.

The usher handed it to the judge, who unfolded it, and soon became immersed in its contents.

Mr. Skinner seemed to collapse.

"What is this?" said the judge.

"What, my lord?"

"This deed is signed by two witnesses. What are the names of the two prisoners at the bar?"

The clerk of the arraigns referred to his documents, and then said—

"John Norman and Richard Sare, my lord."

"I thought so," said the judge. "Here, then, is a most important and unlooked-for piece of evidence. This deed, the purport of which has been correctly described, is signed by William Winberry, and the signature has been witnessed by John Norman and Richard Sare, the names, it appears, of the two prisoners at the bar."

These words caused a profound sensation throughout the court.

The judge had the deed handed to the jury, who, one by one, examined it.

"I have done with you," said Mr. Nuttall to Mr. Skinner. "You can stand down."

Mr. Skinner did not need telling twice.

He was out of the box like a shot.

But the judge was not going to let him escape so easily, so he said—

"Officers, detain that man. Do not let him leave the court until I give him permission."

Mr. Wrixlegs was close at hand, so he made himself useful by taking the rascally attorney into custody.

The counsel for the defence looked very wrath at Mr. Skinner for the woful botch he had made of the affair.

But instead of giving up, as one would have thought, he resolved to stick to the battle to the last.

"Call Robert Hood," he said.

"Robert Hood," repeated the usher.

All looked eagerly and anxiously to see who the next witness for the defence could be.

They were rather disappointed when they saw a Bow-street police-officer enter the witness-box.

The oath was administered, and then the counsel for the defence said—

"Is your name Robert Hood?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a police-officer, employed at Bow-street?"

"I am, sir."

"Do you recollect the night of the twenty-seventh of the past month?"

"Quite well, sir."

"Be good enough to tell the jury what happened on that night which causes it to live in your memory."

"Take your time, and be careful."

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE MAKES A BEWILDERING SPEECH TO THE JURY, AND THE TRIAL MEETS WITH A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

THERE WAS NOT a person present who did not wonder what this officer could have been called to swear to.

But their wonder was soon satisfied.

The officer proceeded to give his evidence in that mechanical kind of way for which such gentlemen are noted.

"I was at the station in Bow-street, when Pursford, the officer, came in and asked for assistance."

"Well."

"I was one the inspector sent with him."

"What did he want assistance for?"

"He said he had seen three suspicious-looking persons enter the haunted house in Birdcage-walk."

"And you were one who accompanied him, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then be good enough to relate what took place."

"We made our way to our destination as fast as we could, and, on arriving, we went straight up to the front door."

"Well?"

"We had scarcely gained it when we heard the loud report of a pistol from somewhere within, and we considered that sufficient to authorize us to break down the door, which we did with implements we brought with us for the purpose, in expectation that we should have some such work to do."

"Please to continue what you saw and did."

"When the door was broken down, we of course found ourselves in the entrance-hall of the house."

"With our lanterns we looked all about us, and the first thing we noticed was a number of footprints on the floor, the dust upon which had left the impressions just as snow would."

"What next?"

"We followed these traces, and found they all, without deviation or exception, led to the bottom of the stairs. Up these we ascended, until the footprints terminated—some at the door of a room on the second-floor, while others went up to the higher portion of the house."

"Yes!—what of those which went up to the upper portion of the house?"

"I stood at the bottom of the stairs, by Pursford's orders, in order to see that no one either went up or came down, while the others went into the room."

"Never mind their proceedings, continue your own."

"Some were left at the bottom of the stairs, while I and several more ascended them to see what was above."

"And what was the result of your search?"

"We found by the prints in the dust that one person, and one only, had ascended the stairs, and those footprints terminated at an attic door, which we broke down."

"We were, however, rather too late. Whoever it was had managed to get out of the window, and most periously draw himself up on to the roof."

"Did you see this man?"

"No, at least when I say no, I did just catch a glimpse of him, but that was all."

"What next?"

"We went out on to the landing, and got out on to the roof by means of a trap-door; but we were too late, our prey had escaped, nor could we find the least trace of him, although we hunted closely all over the roofs."

"And then you returned to your companions, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, then. I have no further question to ask you."

"Stay," said Mr. Nuttall, as the officer was about to leave the box. "When you came down after your unsuccessful search, you went to your comrades, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had they made any prisoners?"

"Two, sir."

"Did you see them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice their faces?"

"Yes, sir, for I thought perhaps I might be called upon to swear to their identity."

"Well, then, look at the dock, and tell me whether either of those men you see standing there are the same as you saw in custody at the haunted house."

"Yes."

"Which are they?"

"The two standing next me, sir."

"Did you accompany them to Newgate after their capture?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice them recognize the other prisoner?"

"Yes, they cried out when they saw him, as though they were surprised to find him there."

"Oh! did they? Now, did you notice whether the other prisoner responded to that recognition in any way?"

"He looked angry. That was all."

"Very good. You can stand down, Mr. Hood. I have nothing further to say to you."

The counsel for the defence, who had been eagerly engaged in a whispered conversation with a barrister who sat next to him, now rose to his feet.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"The witness just dismissed is the last one I shall call for the defence, and I shall do no more than crave your indulgence for a few moments, while I recapitulate a little, and call your attention to one or two points in the evidence, both defensive and prosecutive."

"In the first place, you cannot have failed to have perceived that the most militatory evidence against my client is that given by a person to whom you ought to be most careful how you give credibility, since he avows himself a highwayman, and a violator of those laws by which society is banded together."

"At the same time, it must not be forgotten that he is obnoxious to the charge of murder, as the evidence produced has testified."

"The presence of my client in the Birdcage-walk has been most satisfactorily accounted for."

"His capture followed as a matter of course."

"And now, as to the deed, which I maintain should never have been given into the hands of the court."

"I consider that altogether beyond the question."

"What arrangement might have existed between my client and his deceased brother is more than I can say, but that the deed was signed by him cannot be disputed."

"This empowers him, of course, to take possession of all."

"But, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, you must see that there are certain persons whose interests would suffer greatly by such a state of things as this, and that they would endeavour to set aside this deed of assignment if they possibly could do so."

"The treatment which Mr. Skinner received when he went to the hall on a perfectly legal errand will serve to bear out what I say."

"The hypothesis I humbly submit is this."

"By some means or other it got to their ears that Mr. William Winberry had made a deed of assignment of all his property and personal effects to his brother Adrian."

"I then assume that they called on the assistance



[DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.]

of the notorious Dick Turpin, and concerted with him as to what means should be adopted to set this deed aside.

"They then, with great ingenuity, devised the death of Mr. William Winberry, under such circumstances as would tend to fix the guilt upon Adrian.

"But they rather reckoned without their host. The capture of my client so soon was what they scarcely expected, and was brought about by accident alone.

"What they would have wished, no doubt, would be, not to bring the case to the light of day in this court, but compel my client to flee the country.

"But that object failed.

"Such, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, is the theory for the defence, and it will be for you to decide how far it is borne out by the facts that have been brought before you.

"That it carries upon the face of it a certain amount of plausibility is certain.

"With confidence, then, I leave the case to you,

gentlemen of the jury, for your decision, under the firm conviction that you will acquit Mr. Adrian Winberry of the crime imputed to him, and also the two men from any complicity in the murder, since they were hired without having the remotest idea that any such crime as murder was intended."

The counsel for the defence sat down.

Every person in the court drew a long breath.

They looked at each other with a puzzled air as they seemed to ask the question—

"Are we dreaming, or are our intellects so stultified that we have quite misunderstood this case from the first, and is Adrian Winberry innocent, after all?"

Certainly the counsel's extraordinary speech was rather bewildering.

The jury looked at each other like men in a dream.

They were fairly puzzled.

The intellects of jurymen are never over keen. Indeed, those who are gifted with the smallest modicum of intellectual powers are usually selected for the office

Those on the present occasion were, for the most part, men whose brains or minds were capable of holding but one idea at the time.

The counsel for the defence knew this.

He knew, too, that his cause was hopeless, or nearly so.

He knew, however, that the jury would be most impressed with those facts which came last before them.

The trial had lasted for very many hours.

Of a necessity, he argued, they must by this time have got confused on the subject.

But if such was the condition of the minds of the jurymen and spectators, it certainly was not of two persons at least.

One was Mr. Nuttall.

The other the judge.

Their acute, well drilled, and logical minds retained everything tangible from beginning to end.

Still they were staggered by the audacious statements put forward by the counsel for the defence.

But that effect soon evaporated.

Mr. Nuttall rose to his feet.

It then became apparent that he was about to exercise his right of reply.

Much has been said both for and against this right of reply, and it is only occasionally that the prosecuting counsel enforce it; but surely, if ever it was needed, if ever it was justified, it was in this instance.

An intense desire to hear what Mr. Nuttall was going to say took possession of all without reservation—judges, jurymen, counsel, spectators, prisoners, officials—every one, indeed, who stood within the crowded area of the court.

He waited a moment before he commenced speaking, in order that every noise might be allowed to subside.

Seeing why he paused, everyone became immediately silent.

Then he began.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—"

But before he could do more than utter those few, oft-repeated, stereotyped words a great hubbub and confusion took place at the door of the court.

The judge rose.

An angry look was on his face.

"Silence!" he said. "Silence! or no matter at what cost or trouble, I will clear the court."

But his words, although they were uttered in firm, decided tones, were without effect—the noise grew louder and louder.

CHAPTER CCXC.

BLANCHE WINBERRY MOST OPPORTUNELY MAKES HER APPEARANCE IN COURT.

OUR powers of description are quite inadequate to describe the scene of confusion which now raged in the heretofore quiet court of justice.

The tumult, too, instead of lessening, perceptibly increased—one by one the spectators joined in it.

The judge himself, although much annoyed at the unseemly interruption, could not control or subdue the curiosity he felt to know what had caused it.

That it was no ordinary event he felt sure, and with his hands resting upon the desk before him, he leaned forward, and strained his eyes to the utmost, in order to be the first to catch a glimpse of what it was that had caused the disturbance.

But he could see nothing.

The people swayed to and fro, and uttered cries.

That was all.

Suddenly, however, the door of the court was thrown open.

The din increased.

But above all the clamour a voice rose.

Its tones, let it belong to whoever it might, were absolutely stentorian.

"Make way, good people, make way," it said, "make way, in the name of justice and the dead! Stand aside! There is another witness—another witness for the prosecution! Stand aside gently, good people all, and leave a path to the witness-box. It is a young girl. The witness is a delicate young girl. Let her have clear way! Stand aside! stand aside! She is here!"

These words reached the ears of the judge.

They reached, too, the ears of everyone in that court, which was now so crowded that one would have declared it an impossibility for another person to be squeezed into it.

They reached the ears of the three prisoners at the bar, and what little hope they might have entertained up to the present moment was dissipated.

They had no longer any hope to cling to.

Their guilty hearts told them who the witness was that was coming, and whose advent had caused so great a sensation.

But crowded as the court was, the people pressed back. A kind of lane was formed extending to the witness-box.

It was a narrow passage, it is true, but still it was wide enough for one person to squeeze through.

And here it should be stated that the crowd in the various avenues leading to the court was quite as great as was the one within it.

Whoever the witness was that was coming, we know that she was a female from the words uttered by the man with the stentorian voice. She had to force her way through these.

Her progress was slow.

But it was sure.

At length she passed through the doorway, and stood fairly within the court.

Then the judge, from his elevated and advantageous position, saw her.

The jury, too, who had one and all risen to their feet, could see her also.

She was young.

She was fair.

She was beautiful.

That they could see at the first glance.

But her hair was dishevelled.

Her apparel torn.

There were traces of the deepest anguish upon her countenance.

But, despite of these drawbacks, her beauty was visible.

Then Maud Gouldman, who, like the rest, was full of interest to know who the witness was, at last caught sight of her.

She recognized her.

She clapped her hands together.

Then in a tearful voice, she exclaimed, heedless and forgetful of those by whom she was surrounded, the strange manner in which the meeting took place—

"Blanche!—Blanche! It is Blanche! It is Blanche, my dear cousin, come back again! I had given up all hopes of seeing her; but she is here. She is here, and her evidence will suffice to complete the conviction and prove the guilt of her father's murderers. Blanche!—Blanche! It is Maud, your cousin, who calls to you! Blanche!—Blanche!"

These words were spoken with hysterical vehemence and volubility.

They produced an electrical effect upon the mass of spectators who crowded the court.

It might have been that very many of them, from the facts they had become familiar with during the progress of the trial, had something more than a suspicion of who this witness was who had made so strange an intrusion into court at the eleventh hour.

But the words which Maud Gouldman spoke were quite sufficient to set all doubts at rest.

The mysterious Blanche, of whom they had heard so much, was to appear before them.

As we said, a kind of lane was formed, extending from the door of the court to the witness-box.

Along this Blanche passed, until the words her playmate and companion uttered struck upon her ear.

But she did not pause a moment after those words were uttered.

She seemed fully conscious of the fact that there was no time to spare.

Merely waving her hand to Maud, she passed on.

To reach the witness-box, however, she had to pass very near to the dock at which the three prisoners stood.

The expression of Adrian's face when she came so near him was awful to behold.

Its expression even struck the turnkey who was on the dock on guard over him, and kept a watchful eye upon

his actions, for he feared that he would offer some violence to the witness, whose evidence could not be but most prejudicial to his case.

But Blanche passed on in safety, and now she came close to where Dick stood, and he had a full view of her.

It might have been said with perfect truth that every one in court looked at her with the greatest curiosity. But let their curiosity have been as great as it might, it fell far short of that felt by Dick Turpin.

He saw before him the being about whom he had heard so much but never seen, and whose fortunes had become so strangely interwoven with his own.

He saw before him the being to whom he was utterly unknown, and yet for whom he had perilled his liberty and his life.

He was much struck with her appearance.

Despite the unfavourable circumstances under which they met, he could see that she was of surpassing loveliness—yet loveliness altogether different in style to that of Maud Gouldman.

She stepped into the witness-box.

In modest confusion she bowed her head before the myriad eyes that were fixed upon her.

Therier stepped forward.

He had a small book in his hand.

We have already reverted to the extraordinary silence which several times had taken place during the trial—remarkable, because even the breathing of the closely-packed mass made an audible sound.

But thrice had even that sound been hushed into silence.

That phenomenon again took place at this moment.

It might have been that judge, jury, counsel, and spectators, all held their breath for a short time.

But let it be how it might, that remarkable and profound silence again prevailed.

The judge sank back in his chair.

Mr. Nuttall, whose speech had been so strangely interrupted, sat down likewise.

The jury regained their seats.

Then the oath was formally proposed to Blanche, and when she kissed the book, she did it with so much grace that it won the hearts of even the least susceptible who saw it.

The judge looked towards Mr. Nuttall, and the worthy barrister, who perfectly understood the meaning of that glance, rose to his feet.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"I must once more crave your attention to this remarkable case, upon which, I doubt not, a clearer and better light is about to be thrown.

"Much that we could only have surmised at, and stated as the result of surmises, will be made quite patent.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury. Believe me, I must unfeignedly rejoice in the appearance of this witness for the prosecution."

Mr. Nuttall had got thus far when the counsel for the defence rose.

Turning to the judge, he said—

"My lord,—In the course of this investigation I have frequently been compelled to rise to my feet, and protest against the manner in which it has been conducted.

"I cannot refrain from doing so again, and I trust your lordship will not be offended by this attempt to recall you to your duty."

The judge frowned, but said nothing.

Not in the least daunted, the counsel for the defence went on—

"My lord,—I must humbly recall to your notice the evident fact that the case for the prosecution is closed—entirely closed—and it is now too late for them to call any witnesses. I have made my speech for the defence."

The judge replied.

His voice was low and calm, but the words he uttered were stinging ones, and made even the counsel for the defence wince again.

"My learned brother could not, with an hour's rhetoric, have furnished us with a better exemplification of the unsoundness of his case than he has done by the few words he has just spoken. Truth fears nothing, and additional evidence can only serve to elucidate it. I hold that, in this case, I have executed my duty fairly and impartially;

at any rate, I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to do so. Far be it from me, because the case for the prosecution is closed, and the speech for the defence made—far be it from me, I say, on such grounds as those, to set a seal upon the lips of the witness who now stands before the court. Let us patiently hear all that she—the daughter of the man whose murder we have assembled to adjudicate upon—may have to say; and let us hope that what she says will enable us to come to a better understanding of this intricate case—prevent us from falling into error, and assist our fallible and prone to err judgments to come to a proper and just decision, that the real culprit may not escape, but receive the penalty which attaches itself to the perpetrators of the heinous crime of murder."

CHAPTER CCXCI.

MR. NUTTALL EXAMINES BLANCHE WINBERRY, AND EXTRACTS SOME IMPORTANT EVIDENCE.

THERE was a universal and spontaneous burst of applause when the judge concluded this speech.

When he commenced, there was not the least excitement visible either in the tone of his voice or in his gestures, but as he proceeded he warmed with his subject, and no longer spoke with the slow, measured accent he did at first. On the contrary, his voice rose, and as his utterance became more rapid, so did his whole body participate in what he said, and at the conclusion of his address he was dramatic and impassioned.

But not even this, nor the expression of approval with which his speech was greeted, had the effect of intimidating the counsel for the defence.

He rose, and before Mr. Nuttall could commence his examination of Blanche Winberry, he spoke as follows, in a voice of deep, affected humility—

"My lord, with what you have just now said, I and all in this court most fully and cordially agree. But in the administration of justice, though the main object must always be to elicit truth, yet in the elicitation of that truth there must be certain forms observed, or else the whole would become a chaos. But, my lord, I trust, you will excuse me if I say that I have noticed throughout this day's proceedings that the personal beauty of the witnesses has exercised an improper influence upon the judgment. Let me, then, caution you, gentlemen of the jury, to shut your eyes to all attractions and blandishments of form and feature, and take the evidence of the witnesses for just what it is worth, and no more."

The counsel for the defence sat down.

The judge evidently considered the speech as not calling for reply; at any rate, he made no reply to it.

Mr. Nuttall had not sat down during this little discussion between the judge and the opposite counsel, and, at a sign from the former, he continued his speech.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—

"The counsel for the defence thought fit to interrupt me in the remarks I was making to you. The objections he raised as to the examination of this witness have been set aside by his lordship; therefore I shall proceed with my questions, in the first place promising to take up no more time than I am compelled.

"First, however, let me cordially endorse what my learned brother for the defence has said with respect to not allowing our judgment to be biased by the personal attractions of the witnesses.

"He has gone so far as to accuse us of having already given way to that natural feeling, but on my own part let me state that the cause referred to has had no effect whatever upon me.

"But the caution, nevertheless, is a wise and good one, and with him I trust that it will be borne in mind by all when the time for decision arrives."

After thus speaking, Mr. Nuttall turned towards the witness whose evidence he deemed sufficiently important to justify his questioning her himself.

"What is your name?"

"Blanche."

The accents of her voice were low and musical.

"That is only your Christian name," said Mr. Nuttall; "what is your surname?"

"Winberry."

"Thank you. And now tell me your father's name."

"William Winberry."

"Where did he reside?"

"At the Hall."

"Where is the Hall situated?"

"About midway between Hendon and Hampstead."

"Upon what occasion did you see your father last?"

"It was at the Hall, sir."

"How long is it ago?"

"A long time it seems to me, sir—so long, indeed, that I cannot tell when, for in my solitary prison I have lost all count of time."

Blanche sobbed convulsively.

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury—Excuse me for interrupting myself to make a remark relative to this witness. Having only just made her way into the court, she must of necessity be altogether ignorant of all that has transpired in the course of these long proceedings, which fact cannot fail to impart additional importance to all she says."

Then turning to Blanche, who had somewhat recovered her composure, he said—

"You cannot recollect how long it is since you last saw your father?"

"No, sir, I cannot, but it is a long time."

"You saw him at the Hall, I think you said?"

"Yes, sir. It was one afternoon—or rather evening. I left him in the library, while I went out to take a ramble through the grounds, as was my usual custom."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What was your destination?"

"A walk."

"Oh! simply a walk."

"Yes, sir."

"Who was the last person you saw, after leaving the Hall?"

"My cousin Maud."

"Where was she?"

"At a window which overlooked the lawn, across which I took my way. She watched me, and waved her hand repeatedly."

"Exactly. We were acquainted with all these particulars. Now be good enough to tell the court what happened to you after you got out of sight of your companion Maud."

Blanche hesitated.

From what source no one could tell.

"I presume, sir, you do not wish to know all that took place after the time you mention, but simply wish an account of the manner I was abducted, which was while I was on my way back home?"

"If anything of a private nature took place during your excursion, not relating to the subject in hand, we have no wish to press you."

Blanche looked relieved.

It then became clear that there was some secret in connexion with her solitary rambles.

It was noted by several that the counsel for the defence took a note of this circumstance, so it was clear he had not lost all hopes of winning the battle, or that, at all events, it was still his determination to fight to the last gasp.

"You say it was while you were returning home, after your walk, that you were carried off?"

"Yes, sir; I was passing through the shrubbery, which adjoins the lawn, when suddenly I heard a crackling noise, but before I could turn round to see what it was, or utter a cry for succour, something was thrown over my head."

"What was this something like?"

"It seemed to me, sir, to be a kind of cloak, such as are sometimes worn by gentlemen in cold weather, either when riding or walking."

"And something of that sort was suddenly thrown over your head?"

"Yes, sir, and drawn closely over my shoulders, so that I could neither see who my assailants were or cry for help. Nor was I able to struggle, for my arms were seized with a powerful grasp."

"What happened next?"

"One of my captors spoke, and threatened to slay me on the spot if I refused to accompany them. I was terrified and half-fainting. I was carried away without being wholly conscious of what was happening to me."

"Fray, go on."

"I was hurried along for some distance on foot, and

then we came to a halt. Immediately I was raised up and set down again. I could not see, but the feel told me I was in a carriage or a vehicle of a similar description."

"And all this time you did not so much as catch a glimpse of the countenances of your abductors?"

"I did not, sir. The cloak was kept close down over my face."

"Then the vehicle in which you had been seated was, I presume, set in motion?"

"It was, sir, and I was taken some distance; how far I know not, nor do I know how long a space of time the journey lasted, so extreme was my agitation. At length the carriage stopped. The cloak was still over my face, so I could not tell where I was. However, they led me forward a few paces, and then a door was closed."

Blanche paused a moment, and the usher handed her a glass of water, which she drank with evident pleasure.

The interest that was felt in her narrative far transcended any that had been felt that day, when so many strange transactions were brought to light. All she said not only presented all the glowing attractions of romance, but it also had the additional charm of being true.

After a brief pause the witness resumed.

"I heard a door closed behind me," she said, "and securely fastened. Then I was forced to ascend a great many steps, so many, that when I reached the top I was quite breathless. Here another door was opened and then closed."

"I remained immovable for several minutes, until the deep silence with which I was environed terrified me. Then I made a desperate attempt to remove the cloak, and succeeded."

"I should have done so more easily if I had gone more gently about the task. However, as soon as the cloak was removed, I looked as well as I could about me,

"I was alone."

"I was in darkness."

"But the darkness was only partial, and doubtless, in consequence of my eyes having been kept from the light so long, I was able to see tolerably well about me, and to define the kind of place I was in."

"It was a small apartment, rudely furnished, like a bedchamber. The roof was low and irregular in shape, as though it was immediately beneath the roof."

"The light came in through a small window, and I at once hastened towards it in the faint hope of accomplishing my escape."

"But on a closer approach I found the aperture, which was scarcely large enough to admit the passage of my body, was strongly defended by a network of iron bars."

"I then burst into tears, and wept till daylight."

"When the dawn came, and the different objects in the room became more distinguishable, I looked out of window in the hope that I might form some idea whereabout I was."

"Nothing, however, met my gaze, but a number of roof-tops and little attic windows, packed as closely as possible together, and extending as far as I could see in every direction."

"I then felt sure that I must have been carried to London; and while I wondered what was the cause of my abduction, I wept when I thought how slight a chance my father would have of finding me in a huge place like London."

"As I had fancied in the night, the room in which I was confined was an attic immediately beneath the tiles. The door through which I had been brought was opposite the window. I had not been to it; I had not tried to open it and endeavour to make my escape that way, because I felt certain that it was securely fastened."

"However, as a kind of forlorn hope, I crossed the room in that direction, but before I could reach it, I heard someone removing the fastenings."

CHAPTER CCXCII.

BLANCHE WINBERRY CONCLUDES HER EVIDENCE, AND IDENTIFIES THE BODY OF HER FATHER.

AGAIN DID Blanche Winberry pause for breath in her wondrously interesting narrative.

She had spoken with considerable rapidity, being anxious to take up no more time than she possibly could help; but it seemed that there were times when the

recollection of the dangers and the difficulties she had gone through overpowered her.

With a perceptible effort, however, she regained her composure, and continued—

"When I heard those sounds I knew that some one was about to enter the apartment, and instinctively I drew back as far as possible from the door, while my heart beat so painfully that I could scarcely breathe.

"One of my abductors was doubtless about to make his appearance. Perhaps I should learn the reason why I had been carried off.

"The door was thrown open and a man appeared upon the threshold.

"At first, however, I scarcely obtained a glimpse of his countenance, for he turned round the moment he entered, and carefully closed the door behind him.

"Then he stood with his back to it, and looked at me attentively.

"I returned his gaze as well as my terror would allow me.

"I knew him in a moment, although I had only seen him once before; but the circumstances of our meeting were of such a character that it made it impossible for me to forget him."

"What were those circumstances?" asked Mr. Nuttall.

"I was in the library with Maud and my father, when Mr. Adrian Winberry was announced. My father desired Maud and myself to leave the room, and let him have his interview in private, for it was not his wish that we should make the acquaintance of our uncle."

"And did you leave the room in accordance with his desire?"

"Yes, sir."

"And yet you saw him then?"

"I did."

"How was that?"

"We left the room—"

"Your companion and yourself?"

"Yes. We determined to take a ramble together in the grounds, and, while we were crossing the hall, we encountered my uncle, who was then going in the direction of the library."

"And that was when you saw him?"

"Yes; he had his hat off, and I saw him very plainly. I looked at him more attentively than I should have done, but I felt curious about this uncle whose acquaintance my father did not desire me to make."

"Did your uncle speak to you?"

"No, sir; he merely bowed and passed on. When we returned from our walk we found father in the library very much agitated. He was a long time before he would tell me the cause of it, until I elicited from him that my uncle, having squandered away the annual income left to him by my grandfather, had endeavoured to extort money from my father."

"But he did not succeed in his endeavours?"

"No, sir. My father refused him, and solely on account of the manner in which the demand was made."

"And you say the person you saw in the hall announced himself as your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry, and was acknowledged by your father to be such?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you saw his features distinctly?"

"I did, sir."

"And you recognized the person who came into your room as your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure you made no mistake?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Well, then, be good enough to look carefully at the three prisoners at the bar, and then tell the court whether you recognise any one of them as being the individual you saw upon the two occasions referred to, namely, your uncle, Mr. Adrian Winberry."

As directed, Blanche turned her eyes towards the bar at which the prisoners stood.

As she did so, the eyes of every person in the court followed hers, and settled upon the prisoners with a concentrated gaze.

It was observant that all three shrank before it.

They looked like three miserable objects in whose breasts all hope was dead.

The gaze which Blanche fixed upon the prisoners was a clear and steady one,

She was slightly puzzled with the change which Adrian had made in his personal appearance.

But that white mark upon his forehead, which seemed set there like the brand of Cain, that he might be known of all men, prevented her having any serious doubts of his identity.

She raised her arm and pointed towards him, while he cowered down in the dock like a guilty wretch before the finger of the accusing angel.

"That is the man!" she said.

"Which?" asked Mr. Nuttall.

"The third one from me! He who stands furthest off!"

There could be no mistake as to who the fair witness meant.

"Will you swear positively to his identity?"

"Most positively. He has made some changes in his personal appearance since I last saw him, but nevertheless I have not the least doubt upon my mind!"

"That is quite sufficient; continue your relation. Yet, stay! Do you know the other two prisoners at the bar?"

"Yes, I have seen them both before!"

"Indeed! where? Under what circumstances? In company with the other prisoner?"

"Yes, sir; I have seen them both at the house where I was confined. They appeared to live in it."

"You are sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure!"

"And it is a long time since you saw them first?"

"Oh! yes; but I saw one of them on the first day of my incarceration. He brought my food!"

"Indeed!" Then turning to the judge, Mr. Nuttall said—

"My lord, this portion of the evidence given is most important, since it serves to altogether demolish the theory set up by the counsel for the defence, and of which this witness knows nothing. You must couple, too, with this the fact of their names being upon the deed, which I think clearly shows them to be accomplices, and criminal in the highest degree."

"I have not allowed any of the facts to escape my observation, brother Nuttall. The case is now rapidly becoming clearer, and I think we shall have but little trouble in bringing the guilt home to the right parties. Be good enough to continue the examination of this witness."

Mr. Nuttall bowed assent, and then turning to Blanche, he said—

"You swear, then, to the identity of all three prisoners at the bar?"

"I do, sir, most unhesitatingly."

"Then we will leave that point. Will you be good enough to return to that portion of your narrative at which you broke off, namely, the intrusion of Adrian Winberry into the room in which you were confined?"

"I will, sir."

"What happened after he entered and closed the door?"

"He stood with his back to it, and regarded me attentively, until at length he spoke. I cannot pretend to repeat what he said, word for word, but the substance of it was this. He told me that he had carried me off because my father had refused to accede to his demands to furnish him with money, and that he was resolved he should comply with his wishes—that he would compel him to do so, in fact. He knew the deep love my father bore me, and he determined to use that as a weapon to carry out his ends. Hence my abduction."

"Was he candid enough to avow all this to you?"

"He was, and the circumstance much amazed me, for until then I could not conceive that any one would be bold enough to avow such villainy. But he did, and moreover endeavoured to force me to write a letter to my father, telling him my circumstances, portraying my horrible fate, and entreating him by his love for me to accede to his brother's demand."

"This is monstrous," exclaimed the judge. "Do you swear to all this?"

"I do, my lord," replied Blanche, firmly, and somewhat haughtily, for she did not like the question.

"It surpasses all belief! Continue, I beg."

"I resolutely refused to assist him in his infamous designs in any way whatever. I dared him to do his

worst. I did not fear him, and that neither threats, arguments, or ill-usage would bend me to his purpose."

"Did he renew his solicitations?"

"Not then, sir. He left me with the idea that my firmness would soon give way. But he was mistaken. He did not know the person with whom he had to deal. On the next occasion he found me as at first."

"And did you never give way?"

"Never; but when I was alone devoted the whole of my energies to making my escape. But, alas! my prison was too strong for me to break out of it."

"And you saw the three prisoners frequently?"

"Oh! yes. The two standing nearest to me brought me food, and appeared to occupy the house. Though whether they did so or not, is more than I can say for certain."

"But you made your escape?"

"Oh! yes; but not unaided. All at once my three jailers disappeared. On the last few occasions my uncle told me that he had my father securely in his custody in a place where he would never be found, and that if he did not consent, he should slay him. But this threat I heeded not, because I did not believe my father was in his custody. I thought that was only said to terrify me."

Here Blanche again burst into tears, but by a powerful effort she controlled her emotions, and continued—

"After this, days passed, and I saw nothing of my jailers. No one came near me. Fortunately I had been left with a tolerable stock of provisions, or I should inevitably have died of starvation; but I eked them out as well as I could."

"Last night, however, or rather, I should think, very early this morning, though it was not light, I was aroused from a light sleep I had fallen into by hearing a tapping at the window of my prison."

"I ran towards it instantly. I felt sure it was a friend who had come to rescue me. My heart told me so! No enemy would have come in such a fashion! On reaching the window I found I was right, that a friend had indeed found me, and was about to rescue me."

"I threw open the window, and then we could speak to each other—"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Nuttall; "but was this person who appeared at the window known to you?"

Blanche looked distressed.

She hesitated.

She stammered as she had done on a former occasion. She glanced furtively at Adrian Winberry.

Then her eyes roamed over the court as though she was in quest of something.

But that something, let it be what it might, did not seem to meet her gaze, and once more she glanced at Adrian Winberry.

This behaviour was strange.

It was noticed by all.

Various interpretations were put upon it.

And though the trial had lasted as long as it had, yet it could be seen that the interest which was taken in the proceedings increased rather than diminished.

CHAPTER CCXIII.

IN WHICH A FRESH CHARACTER APPEARS UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION, TO THE DISMAY OF ADRIAN WINBERRY.

THERE was some mystery in this behaviour of Blanche Winberry, but what that mystery was, was more than the acutest intellect there present could surmise.

She wished to speak.

Yet some consideration made her hold back.

Mr. Nuttall, whose interests lay solely with her, and who knew that her hesitation and disinclination to speak arose from no improper motive, was desirous to remove as much as possible the injurious effect which it could not fail to have upon the minds of all.

He addressed himself to her in a calm and gentle voice.

"You hesitate to reply to the question I have asked you. You hesitated upon a former occasion. It may be that such hesitation is quite natural, and that you have a good reason for it, but I must request you, for your own sake, and for the sacred cause of justice, to speak freely and fearlessly. Make no reservation, lest that which you should hold back should militate against you. Tell me, in

a word, whether the person who attracted your attention by tapping at the attic window was known to you?"

"He was known," said Blanche, faintly. "That is—"

"What?"

"I had seen him many times."

"Then you must have known him?"

"Yes, I did know him."

"That is all we wished to ascertain," said Mr. Nuttall.

Blanche gave an evident sigh of relief.

The mystery was not elucidated yet, though doubtless it soon would be.

"When I opened the window we spoke to each other. He told me how he had been searching for me ever since my disappearance, but that he had only just succeeded in finding me. To the bottom part of the house he could not obtain access, nor could he force away the iron bars which guarded the attic window. At length he determined to make a breach through the roof, and this, after incredible labour—for he had no tools—he accomplished. He drew me through the aperture on to the roof, and from thence without much trouble, we made our way to the ground. With all speed I made my way to the hall, and, upon arriving there, learned what had happened, and what was taking place here to-day, and, in spite of all obstacles and objections, I made my way here, and, as I hope and trust, not too late to be of service."

One of the jury men rose.

"I have to suggest that this witness, having identified the prisoners, should, in order to make her evidence complete, be taken to view the dead body, and identify that also."

"I would fain have spared the witness so painful a task," said Mr. Nuttall, "but if you think it necessary to the ends of justice, I am sure she will not hold back."

"I leave the matter with his lordship," said the juryman.

"I think it will be best to identify the body."

"I am ready," said Blanche, in a low, firm voice.

We will not linger upon this painful portion of our story.

Let it suffice to say, simply, and once for all, that Blanche was taken to the anteroom where the corpse lay, and that she of course identified it as being that of her father.

She returned to court, and then the trial was continued.

"I have no more questions to ask this witness," said Mr. Nuttall, "and she may stand down, without my brother for the defence wishes to put any questions to her."

The counsel for the defence rose to his feet.

"Really," he said, "this case has been conducted in such an extraordinary manner—there has been such a complete abrogation of all existing forms and precedents, that I very candidly confess I hardly know how to act. The first thing that strikes me, however, is that we have nothing to prove the identity of the witness, who has just given what I may call the most romantic narrative for evidence that was ever heard within the four walls of this court."

Mr. Nuttall rose.

"If the identity of this witness presents any difficulty to my learned friend, and he would like to have her sworn to, there are at this moment a dozen persons in court who are willing to do so."

"We will pass over that point, then," said the counsel; "I merely adverted to it because it was the first that occurred to my mind. Admitting that the witness is what she professes herself to be, I think it quite evident that she has not told the whole truth in the matter. I am the more sure of this, because once or twice during her examination by my learned friend, she faltered and hesitated, either like one who had something to conceal, or else like one who had but imperfectly learned the part she was to speak. Which of this two it is, as you are aware, is out of my province to decide."

"The witness awaits your cross-examination, if you wish to put any questions to her," said the judge.

"Then, my lord, I will just ask this witness to tell the court what took place after she left her father's house on the occasion referred to."

Again came that distressed and agitated look over the countenance of Blanche.

Again did she glance furtively at Adrian Winberry. Again did her eyes roam over the sea of faces in the court, as if in search of a particular one.

But this time she seemed to succeed in seeing that for which she looked, for, upon her eye resting somewhere, the expression of her face underwent a total change.

She looked up into the face of the counsel for the defence calmly, and as though quite prepared to answer any question he might ask her.

This little bit of bye-play had not been lost on any one, though it was inexplicable to all who saw it.

The counsel took a note of it in his own mind, and then seeing Blanche apparently waiting, he repeated the question he had previously asked.

"After crossing the lawn," said Blanche, "I entered the shrubbery which adjoins it. Passing through this I came to a stile, where I waited."

"For what reason did you wait?"

"I had an appointment."

"Indeed," said the counsel for the defence, with a triumphant look at the jury, as much as to say, I have got hold of something important at last. "Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you be good enough to say with whom?"

"I cannot."

"Cannot?"

"No."

"But you must."

"I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not know."

"That is a very satisfactory reason; but excuse me for making the remark, it seems a little singular that you should have an appointment, and not know with whom!"

"Oh! Then it appears the appointment was with one of the masculine gender, whose name you did not know? I am afraid, now, if the whole truth is told, your disappearance from home will be very easily accounted for."

"I do not understand you, sir!"

"Will you save trouble now at once by confessing that the story of the abduction, with all the romantic incidents belonging to it, is a fiction?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Oh! you won't save trouble?"

"What I have sworn to, sir, is the truth, and I call upon heaven to witness it."

The counsel shrugged his shoulders and continued—
"Well, then, be good enough to say what took place while you waited at the stile."

The person for whom I waited came."

"And you had some conversation with him?"

"Yes."

"What next?"

"We parted."

"Parted?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite, sir."

"What caused you to part?"

"Our meeting was a secret one—it had already lasted some time, and I was afraid we should be discovered, so we parted."

"With a promise to meet again?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what took place after your parting?"

"What I have previously related to you."

"That a cloak was thrown over your head, and you were carried off?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now, then, was not the person you met at the stile the one who carried you off?"

"What, Mr. Adrian Winberry? Oh! no."

"It was not Mr. Winberry who carried you off?"

"That is not what I meant."

"What did you mean? I should really advise you to be careful, for you are trifling with your evidence in a very improper manner."

"I am not, sir. It is you who wish to pervert and put a wrong construction upon all my replies. What I said was, that the person I met at the stile had nothing to do with my abduction, and it was he who rescued me, and without whose aid I could not possibly have been here to-day!"

Blanche spoke with great spirit and energy, and a hum of applause followed her words.

But the ushers soon hushed it by uttering their monotonous cry, "Si—lence, Si—lence!"

"And do you positively swear to that?"

"I do, sir."

"Then why did you hesitate and appear confused when you were questioned upon this point by my learned brother for the prosecution?"

"Because"—

"Because what?"

"The person had requested me to avoid, if possible, all mention of him."

"Indeed, then, there is something mysterious in that, and it is always a safe rule to call anything or any one mysterious, suspicious likewise."

Blanche's eyes again roamed over the court.

"Now, witness," said the counsel for the defence, "look at me, and tell me whether the person you speak of is in court?"

Blanche looked appealingly at the judge.

"Must I answer that question, my lord?"

"It will be best to do so."

"Then he is in court."

"Then," said the counsel for the defence, "I trust, my lord, you will give orders for no one to be allowed egress from this place. This mysterious individual, of whose identity, however, I have more than a suspicion, must be brought forward."

"You may save yourself the trouble," said a voice from the body of the court. "I am here, and am quite ready to step forward."

The voice that pronounced these words was stern in its tones, and yet anyone could tell it was a youth who spoke.

But the effects of that voice upon two persons was marked and extraordinary.

Blanche Winberry started, and a crimson glow overspread her countenance.

Adrian Winberry started, and at the same time uttered such a horrible cry, compounded of rage and fear, that every one shrank back appalled.

It was evident he recognized the voice of the person who was willing to come forward.

But what was there in that recognition to cause him to utter such a cry? Why should it have produced such a remarkable effect upon him?

These are questions to which the next few lines will afford an adequate answer.

CHAPTER CCXCIV.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERIOUS WITNESS REVEALS HIMSELF, AND THE JUDGE COMMENCES SUMMING UP THE CASE TO THE JURY.

THAT the person who said he was ready to come forward fully meant what he said could be seen by the vigorous manner in which he set about forcing a passage through the crowd.

He made his way in a direct line towards the witness-box.

From the judge on the bench, down to the meanest official or the most uninterested spectator among the audience, there was not one who did not feel the keenest desire to see what this person was like.

Those, too, with whom he came in contact, gave way right and left before him.

It took him but a moment to reach the witness-box, and as soon as he did reach it, without waiting for Blanche to descend, and without being told what he ought to do, he pulled open the little door, and stood in the narrow place by her side.

Then he looked fearlessly round the court.

All saw, then, that he was a young man about twenty years of age—that time of life when the high aspirations and poetry of youth have not become lost in manhood.

He was strikingly handsome, not merely in his features but in his form, which was manly and robust, while he carried himself with an air which could not fail to win the admiration of all who saw it.

But though his eye was bright, and its expression fearless, yet it could be seen that if he had been left to his own choice in the matter, he would never have revealed himself, though for what reason none knew.

The attention of all in court was so much fixed upon this young man, that very few, if any, noticed the expression of Adrian Winberry's countenance.

It was awful in the extreme.

He glared at the young man who stood in the witness-box with the deadliest hatred in his eye.

In fine, the expression was such that if he had been possessed of any means of taking away his life he would not have shrunk from doing so.

As they stood in the witness-box Blanche and this mysterious youth formed a well-matched pair; nor did it require much foresight to see that they loved each other.

But it was against the usage of the court for two persons to stand together in the witness-box, so the usher held open the door for one of them to descend.

"Who do you wish to remain?" asked the judge.

"The young man," said the counsel for the defence, "though I may probably wish to recall the other witness."

Blanche had no resource but to quit the witness-box, and which, to tell the truth, she was by no means unwilling to do.

The counsel for the defence looked for a long time at this young man, and then he said—

"What is your name?"

Mr. Nuttall rose.

"Pardon me," he said addressing the judge, "but as this is a witness for the prosecution, though somewhat strangely brought forward, it is my right to be the first in putting any questions to him."

"Certainly."

"But I claim him for a witness for the defence, my lord!" said the opposing counsel, "and I maintain that I have the right to question. My learned friend for the prosecution may cross-examine at his discretion."

"If you will listen to me," said the young man from the witness-box, in a clear but sad tone of voice, "I can give an account of all I know without being questioned by any one."

"I decide in favour of the counsel for the prosecution," said the judge.

The counsel for the defence sat down with a bang.

Mr. Nuttall turned his attention to the witness, and of course put the same question as the other had done.

"What is your name?"

"Be good enough to understand that though I am acquainted with Miss Blanche Winberry, yet she is not only in ignorance of who I am, but does not know even my name. Chance brought us together in a simple manner, which need not to be told here. I had a reason for concealing my name."

"That reason cannot hold good here," said Mr. Nuttall, "so you will be good enough to tell the court what it is."

"I intended to do so. Only I thought it would be best to make that statement."

"Very well, sir. Now tell us your name?"

"Adrian Winberry!"

Had a bombshell fallen into the court it could not have produced a greater sensation than the mere utterance of that name did.

All were positively aghast.

As for Blanche, she uttered a faint scream, and shrunk back when her unknown preserver revealed himself.

Mr. Nuttall, it seemed, could scarcely credit his own ears, for he said—

"Did I understand you to say that your name is Adrian Winberry?"

"You did, sir. Such is my name."

"Then you are a relative?"

"I am, sir."

"In what degree do you stand related to her?"

"I am her cousin!"

"You are, then, a relative of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I am, sir."

"You are sorry for it, no doubt? Be good enough to tell the court in what precise degree of relationship you stand to him?"

There was a moment's silence after this question was propounded, during which the spectators looked from the Adrian Winberry who stood at the bar and the Adrian Winberry who stood in the witness-box.

As they did so, all could trace certain points of resemblance between the two, so that when the witness, in a sad and unsteady tone, said—

"He is my father!"

None were surprised. They had anticipated the reply.

"Your father?" exclaimed Mr. Nuttall. "Then of course you will give no evidence against him?"

"I trust I shall be spared that trial. Yet I can corroborate a portion of Miss Blanche Winberry's statement without doing so."

"Then we shall be very glad to hear you."

"I suppose it does not matter in what way the acquaintanceship between Miss Blanche Winberry and myself began. It was, as I before stated, in the first case the result of a mere chance accident."

"We are bound to believe that part of your testimony. But I think you said Miss Winberry was unacquainted with your name until you now pronounced it. Is this so?"

"It is, sir."

"But, on the occasion of your first meeting, I presume you knew who she was?"

"I did, sir. She told me. Then I knew that my father had an ill feeling towards this part of our family, and he strictly forbade me ever to make the acquaintance of any member of it."

"But how came you to be near Hampstead on the occasion in question?"

"I had not long returned from Spain with my father. I was born in Spain. I accompanied him to Hampstead. He said he was going there on business with this brother whom he so detested, and would not allow me to enter with him, so I had to wait in the lane until he came to me."

"I understand. It was then, while waiting, I presume, that chance threw you in the way of Miss Blanche Winberry?"

"You are right in that surmise, sir."

"And were your meetings afterwards continued?"

"They were, sir; and with that perverseness which so often manifests itself, a mutual affection sprang up between us which neither could control."

"But did you not confide the secret of who you were to the lady?"

"No, sir. On the contrary, I implored her to keep all that had passed between us a profound secret, because I argued that, as the hate was mutual, she would only draw much ill usage upon herself."

"Indeed."

"That is precisely it. I saw her many times, and when I last left her, it was with a promise upon her part to meet me at the same place on the following evening. I went, but she came not, and then I learned the intelligence, from various people I saw in the neighbourhood, that she had mysteriously disappeared."

"And was that all the intelligence you possessed upon the subject?"

"It was, sir."

"Where was your father?"

"I cannot tell, sir."

"Why not? Do you refuse to do so?"

"By no means. I simply say I cannot tell you, because I do not know; he said he should be absent for some time, and desired me to remain at the hotel at which we had taken up our quarters during our stay in England."

"And did you?"

"Not altogether. When I heard of the mysterious disappearance of Miss Blanche Winberry I directed the whole of my attention to finding her. I could not join in the search in a legitimate manner, as I could have wished, because of revealing myself. But I worked in solitude and secrecy, and after infinite trouble, succeeded in finding her almost dead with cold and hunger in the garret of a house in Lambeth."

"Well, sir?"

"I freed her from that place, and accompanied her to her father's residence, with the intention of avowing who I was, and of asking the hand of his daughter. Upon arriving, however, we found the whole place in an uproar, learned that Mr. Winberry, her father, had been murdered, and that the trial was even then in progress. Accordingly, at the urgent request of Miss Winberry, I brought her here, and with what has happened since you must already be acquainted."

The young man paused.

It will be noticed that not one word of the evidence he gave incriminated his father in any way. All he did was to



[TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK LEARN IMPORTANT INFORMATION AT THE ROAD-SIDE INN.]

corroborate the statements made by the being whom he loved and valued more than any one in the world beside.

Mr. Nuttall made a sign that his examination had concluded, and the counsel for the defence, on being asked whether he had any questions to ask, gave a surly reply in the negative.

CHAPTER CCXCV.

THE JUDGE SUMS UP THE CASE AGAINST ADRIAN WINBERRY IN A VERY CLEAR AND LOGICAL MANNER.

THE ASPECT PRESENTED BY THIS TRIAL AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE WAS CERTAINLY WITHOUT ALL PRECEDENT.

BUT THE PROTRACTED PROCEEDINGS WERE NOW CLOSE UPON TERMINATION.

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE HAD, BEYOND DOUBT, FOUGHT HIS CLIENT'S BATTLE WELL.

HE HAD FOUGHT IT IN THE FACE OF THE UTMOST OPPOSITION, AND IN DEFIANCE OF COMMON SENSE.

NO. 54.—BLACK BERR.

SUCH A BATTLE MIGHT BE PROLONGED, BUT VICTORY WOULD BE QUITE HOPELESS.

IT WILL BE RECOLLECTED THAT WHEN BLANCHE MADE HER sudden and somewhat dramatic appearance in the court, the counsel had made his speech for the defence, and Mr. Nuttall had begun to make his reply.

IN WHAT WAY, THEN, WERE THE PROCEEDINGS TO BE RESUMED?

THE EVIDENCE WHICH HAD JUST BEEN GIVEN, SO COMPLETE AS IT WAS, AND BEARING, AS IT DID, SO INTIMATELY UPON THE CASE, WAS ALTOGETHER AGAINST HIM, NOR COULD HIS ACUTE INTELLECT PERCEIVE ANY POINT UPON WHICH AN ATTACK COULD BE MADE WITH ANY PROSPECT OF SUCCESS.

IF HE HAD, HE WOULD HAVE CROSS-EXAMINED HIS CLIENT'S SON, THOUGH PERHAPS HE THOUGHT IT QUITE AS WELL TO LEAVE HIM TO HIMSELF.

THE JUDGE, HOWEVER, PASSED THE COMPLIMENT OF ASKING HIM WHETHER HE HAD ANY MORE TO SAY.

HE REPLIED IN THE NEGATIVE.

"I quite ignore the latter part of this case,"

"I have made my speech for the defence, and the matter now rests awaiting the verdict of the jury."

With these words he sat down.

Mr Nuttall rose.

"Since this is the determination of my learned brother, I shall not trouble the court with my reply, but leave the case to his Lordship to sum up."

Mr Nuttall sat down.

The judge turned over his notes.

They were more than usually voluminous, and it would speak well for the clearness of his intellect if he was able to have them all in view, and give a luminous summary of the whole.

Those who had listened to the proceedings thus far felt like those who have watched at the bedside of a loved one laid prostrate with a lingering illness, and then been told that the time for the crisis had arrived, and that the patient would either recover or die.

There was no occasion, then, to call for order while the judge looked over his notes. Indeed, all were intensely occupied with gazing upon his countenance, as though they could see there the shadow of coming events.

But the attempt was a futile one.

His stern face, compressed lips, and clear bright eyes, were inscrutable.

At length he commenced the delivery of his address in the following terms.

His voice, when he began, was low and somewhat indistinct, so that his hearers were compelled to stretch their senses of audition to the utmost to catch at the purport of what he said.

But as he proceeded his voice grew stronger, until eventually it filled the whole of the courthouse, and every one could hear with perfect distinctness.

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"When opening their speeches, both the counsel for the prosecution and the counsel for the defence adverted to the singular nature of the case upon which you are now called upon to adjudicate.

"I cannot refrain from commencing in the same manner, and endorsing what they have said. The case is certainly a most singular one, and there is nothing in the whole course of my recollection like it.

"It is complicated, too, to a most extraordinary degree, and I much regret that so much feeling—so much romance—so much extraneous matter has been imported into it.

"The difficulty of separating the incidents is great, and that the incidents do require separation is evident, in order that some kind of clear conclusion may be come to.

"It is my duty to put the case before you in this manner, gentlemen of the jury, and if I do not properly accomplish that important duty, I hope you will do me the justice to take into consideration the perplexing character of the evidence, and the voluminousness of the notes I have been compelled to take, which conspire in a very great measure to increase the difficulty of my task.

"However, I will do the best I can, and occupy as short a space of time as I possibly can.

"In the first place, then, we have the clear evidence to show that a murder has been committed.

"The body of the murdered man has been seen and sworn to by two witnesses who ought to be relied upon. One was the daughter of the murdered man, and the other the constant and intimate companion of that daughter.

"We may then, I think, safely say that the question of the identity of the murdered man is beyond all cavil and dispute.

"And now, it having been settled who this man is, the question naturally arises, what circumstances led to his death? and by whom would the crime most likely be committed?

"With respect to the first of these questions, it has been shown you in evidence that Mr. Winberry was a gentleman residing on his own estate, which has been stated to be situated about midway between Hampstead and Hendon.

"It has also been deposed that the deceased Mr. Winberry had a brother—or rather a half-brother—named Adrian, who, it is admitted on all hands, stands at the bar of this court, in company with two other prisoners.

"It is also clear that a certain amount of ill-will or dislike subsisted between the two brothers, the cause of

which hatred has been ascribed to the father's will, by which the bulk of the property, both real and personal, was left to the elder brother William, and merely an income of eight hundred pounds a year to Adrian, the younger brother.

"With the terms of this will, whether just or unjust, we have nothing whatever to do, nor does it signify whether the will was the cause of the ill-feeling, or whether the will was sufficient cause for it.

"With all this, I say, you have nothing whatever to do, so that you will bear in mind the clearly established fact that the brothers were unfriendly with each other.

"In consequence of this unfriendliness, the younger brother, Adrian, appears to have left England, and according to a statement made by his son, while under examination, took up his residence in Spain, in which country there is every reason to suppose he remained for a considerable length of time.

"At length, however, having made away with the allowance granted him, it would seem he returned to England, and sought out his brother, demanding of him some kind of pecuniary assistance, which was refused him, and the two brothers separated greater enemies than ever, Mr. William Winberry strictly prohibiting his brother Adrian from entering his doors again.

"But upon the occasion of this visit, the younger brother was distinctly seen by two witnesses, who have both sworn to his identity in the most unhesitating manner.

"So far all is, I think, very straightforward and satisfactory. Unfortunately, the complications have yet to come.

"You have been told how, after these events, Blanche, the daughter of William Winberry, went out one evening for a walk in the grounds, and never returned.

"By her own evidence you have been shown that she had, by chance, made the acquaintance of the son of her father's younger brother, and that dating from the commencement of that acquaintanceship, a mutual affection sprang up between them, though this Adrian Winberry, junior, carefully concealed who he was, the probability being that had he not done so his suit would have come to an end there and then.

"The witness Blanche then related how, after parting with this secret lover, she had hastened home, when her progress was interrupted—in fine, she was carried off.

"The evidence of this witness is in very many respects most important.

"She has sworn that she was taken by her unseen and unknown abductors to a garret at the top of a house in London, where she was left alone.

"She then further affirms that the first person who came in was Adrian Winberry, her uncle. She knew him, she says, instantly, and from this it may be inferred that he presented himself before her free from any disguise.

"The object of his visit was, according to her statement, to endeavour to compel her to write a letter to her father, stating where she was, and what peril she was futrely threatened with, coupled with the request to accede to the request made by her captors.

"This, with praiseworthy firmness, the young lady refused to do, nor could any threats or arguments induce her to alter her decision. The conditions to which her father was to consent in order to procure her liberation were, that he should transfer his wealth and title to his younger brother, reserving only a sufficiency to keep them in comfort.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, must strike you as being a most monstrous proposition, and you cannot wonder if Miss Winberry resolved to suffer a great deal before she made such a request to her father; for she feared that out of his love for her, and consequent grief for her loss, he would be induced to grant the request, in order to have her restored to him, great as the sacrifice was.

"And now it must be borne in mind that the witness positively swears that she saw all three prisoners at the bar in the house in which she was confined, and her impression was that they were the tenants of it. This alone, without any additional evidence, would serve to show that the three prisoners were accomplices, and not, as stated by the counsel for the defence, perfect strangers to each other.

"But I shall shortly come to a more conclusive proof of their accomplicity, but I would wish to finish with

what I am upon. It will be presented to you in due season.

"I wish to recall to your mind that the witness states that for several days before she effected her release or escape, she was not visited by any one, so that she was in imminent danger of starvation. This points to the identity of the prisoners, because during that time they were detained in custody in Newgate."

CHAPTER CCXCVI.

THE JUDGE CONTINUES HIS DIFFICULT TASK, AND STANDS UP BOLDLY IN FAVOUR OF DICK TURPIN. HAVING reached thus far in his summing-up, the judge paused to wipe his face, which was hot and flushed.

The spectators took advantage of the lull, and gave a sigh of relief.

Their pent-up feelings required some outlet.

But the pause which the judge made was only a momentary one, and he resumed in the following manner.

It was observed that several of the jurymen took rough notes of the principal points to which the judge directed their attention.

"Up to the present time, gentlemen, you will perceive that the inclination of the whole of the evidence is to fix the onus of the guilt upon the prisoners at the bar, who were beyond question mixed up with the affair of the abduction.

"This point being conceded, then, see how accurately the whole drift of that evidence chimes in with the other proceedings of the prisoners. I mean with reference to getting possession of the Winberry estates.

"The evidence of Mr. Adrian Winberry, junior, is only valuable for its corroborative qualities, since he can swear that Miss Blanche Winberry was found by him in such a place as she describes.

"This portion of the case, then, can, I think, be left just as it is for the present, while we turn our attention to the discovery of the murder.

"Pursford, who is a Bow-street officer of experience, has stated upon oath how he saw, on the night of the twenty-seventh of the past month, three persons cross the road and enter a house in the Birdcage-walk, which was known to him (Pursford) to be deserted and under the imputation of being haunted.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, was deemed by the officer to be a very suspicious circumstance. He saw these three men at the hour of midnight enter the empty house, and the conclusion to which he came was a very natural one, namely, that they were there after no good.

"In his evidence he states that he went up to the door and found it fast. He listened, but he could hear no sounds of any kind within. He was alone, and conceived it his best plan of action to set off immediately for assistance. He did so, and returned with several men, who had been placed by the inspector at the police-office under his command.

"On their arrival, they gave a summons for admission in the name of the king, but at the same moment there came to their ears the sound of the report of a pistol, and this was judged sufficient to warrant them to break down the door, which they did, and then rushed into the house in a body.

"You will doubtless recollect that in his evidence he gave at length the causes which led them upstairs to the room on the second-floor, in which was found the corpse of the murdered man.

"They had also, in their ascent of the stairs, heard voices and the trampling of feet, as though those in the house had heard the approach of the police, and were seeking safety in instant flight.

"On entering the room in which the murder was committed, they saw opposite to them an open door, and through this they went in search of the murderers.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I wish to direct your attention very particularly to this point—the counsel for the defence having, at one time, tried to destroy the identity of the two prisoners at the bar, John Norman and Richard Sare.

"Passing through this open door, of which I spoke, and crossing another room, the police-officers came to a flight of stairs.

"These led into a passage of some kind or other, which terminated in the small plot of garden ground which lies

at the rear of these houses, and is separated from the Birdcage-walk by iron palings, as I dare say many of you have seen the house in question, it having recently acquired no small share of notoriety.

"In the act of making their escape from this little piece of garden ground, the two men I have just mentioned—Norman and Sare—were captured.

"They were captured, too, by the very police-officer who has given his evidence to you. He swears, without the slightest hesitation, that the two prisoners at the bar are the same as he captured, having looked in their faces attentively both at the time of capture and also at the time of his delivery of them into the hands of the governor of Newgate.

"In the meantime, Mr. Adrian Winberry had been captured and brought to Newgate.

"I do not wish to touch upon his capture now; I would much rather the circumstances attending it were considered separately.

"What I now wish to draw your attention more particularly to is this. Pursford, the officer, swears that when he took his two prisoners into the vestibule of the prison, and they caught sight of Adrian Winberry there, they, doubtless under the surprise of the moment, were incautious enough to utter cries of recognition.

"Whether the other prisoner responded to these recognitory cries is not clear.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I wish you to connect the several links of my evidence together.

"Miss Blanche Winberry swears that Adrian, the prisoner at the bar, came into the room in which she was confined, and made those propositions which have already been given at length.

"She also swears that the two other prisoners, Norman and Sare, appeared in the room, their errand being, as I take it, to bring her the necessities of life.

"Now observe what Pursford, the officer, swears.

"He swears that he saw three persons enter the haunted house.

"He swears that, being directed by certain sounds and indications, he found in a room upon the second floor the body of a man who had been cruelly murdered, and the evidence given at the inquest serves to show that when the officers broke in the murder had only just been committed, and that life was scarcely extinct.

"He swears most positively to the identity of Norman and Sare, and is convinced they are the two men he captured escaping from the haunted house, and delivered into the custody of the governor of Newgate.

"Then he swears, gentlemen of the jury, and this, in my humble judgment, is a most important point, that these two prisoners recognised Mr. Adrian Winberry, and appeared surprised to find him in the vestibule of the prison.

"In connexion with what I have just now stated this says a great deal, and I wish you to ponder over it while I take up another thread in this intricate affair, which I have now the strongest hopes of thoroughly unravelling.

"It unfortunately happens that the events themselves are complicated with minor and extraneous incidents, which make my task difficult to a degree.

"However, I will begin with considering the evidence of one who has come before you in a very remarkable manner—I am not afraid to say in such a manner as no witness ever before came into a court.

"You know, of course, the person to whom I allude, it being, unfortunately for him, no other than the notorious highwayman, Richard Turpin.

"The evidence he gives is all important, but before we consider the evidence itself, there are one or two things requiring your attention.

"As you have heard, the counsel for the defence strongly opposed his evidence being received at all. But though, in his capacity of highwayman, Richard Turpin stands charged with the commission of many crimes, yet he has never been convicted of any.

"But being pursued by the officers who hold a warrant for his apprehension, and having had very many narrow escapes of capture at their hands, it must follow that his apprehension would be the immediate consequence of his appearance in the witness-box to-day.

"Urged, however, by some good feeling, you see he made his way as a spectator in the body of the court. An appeal for protection was made to me on his behalf by

the counsel for the prosecution. But that appeal was quite beyond my jurisdiction. I had no power to protect the witness whatever.

"In spite, however, of this, as you saw, gentlemen of the jury, he came forward and sacrificed his own life—I say sacrificed it, for he has virtually done so, in order that justice should be done upon a daring criminal, who, by committing the revolting crime of murder, has made a happy home desolate.

"Gentlemen of the jury, the circumstances under which the witness came forward must go far to stamp all that he says with truth, and to remove the prejudice against receiving his evidence, which the counsel for the defence endeavoured to establish.

"Taking, then, into consideration all the various circumstances under which he came forward, I think, gentlemen of the jury, you cannot do wrong by receiving his evidence, and attaching that importance to it which I am sure it deserves.

"For my own part, I cannot help characterizing the conduct of this witness as noble in the highest degree, and let me ask where would another person be found to step forward boldly, as he has done, when they were perfectly assured their death would be the result.

"I may say no more. It is possible this witness, by his conduct in this matter, may endeavour to palliate his past misdeeds. How far he may succeed in any such endeavour it is difficult to say.

"There, can however, be no harm in stating that if it had laid in my power I should have allowed him free passage from the court to-day, and given him, at least, a chance for his life."

A loud cheer followed the termination of this speech, and there were very few indeed in the court who did not join in it.

The judge was, in spite of all his skill and judgment, not insensible to popular applause. Indeed, it is sweet to all, from the sovereign on the throne to the pauper in the workhouse.

The judge held up his hand for silence, but the gesture was only replied to by renewed cheering.

At length, however, by the strenuous exertions of the ushers and other officials of the court, order and silence were restored.

The judge resumed his address to the jury.

"Perhaps," he said, "you will consider I have dwelt a little too long on the point of the evidence of this witness being received. I feel that if I am understood I need go no further, simply stating that though ere now there have been many undoubted cases of a witness giving false evidence, yet I think I may make bold to say that a case was never heard of where the witness threw away his own life to do it.

"The fact of the witness being able to make his way through the crowd of officials who throng the entrances to this court without being detected speaks volumes in favour of his keeping out of the clutches of the officers if he was unrounded.

"Nevertheless, he is here! He has avowed himself, and the consequence will be that upon the termination of this trial he will be taken under the escort of the police to one of the strongest cells in Newgate.

Loud expressions of dissent from among the populace responded to this speech, which was far from being in unison with their feelings.

Unheeding it, however, the judge went on.

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"We have yet some important work to do in the shape of reviewing the case, which it is necessary to do completely. I have exceeded the limits I marked out for myself in speaking of this witness, but I will endeavour to compensate for my prolixity.

"In the first place, then, let us carefully weigh over the substance of the testimony given by Turpin, which in one part has a very remarkable connection with the accidental manner in which Adrian Winberry was taken prisoner.

"It appears, then, that on the night in question, Turpin was pursued by his foes, and took refuge in St. James's-park.

"But it seems it was not his intention to remain in the inclosure, but make his way out by one of the many gates around it without loss of time.

"When, however, near the piece of ornamental water

in the centre of the park he heard some bugles blown, and doubtless from experience he knew the meaning of the signals.

"They signified, it seems, that the soldiers on duty at the different gates were not to allow any person egress from the park, which would then become a place where their prey could be speedily hunted down.

"Turpin, however, in this desperate emergency, remembers a house reputed to be haunted, situated in the Birdage-walk, and with the determination of making his way into it, if possible, he crossed the park in that direction.

"By his own statement he succeeded in his attempt, and got into this empty house—how, does not matter. It seems he did get in.

"His next step was to ascend to the upper regions of the house, and when going up the first flight of stairs, he heard a key rattle in the lock of the front door, which was immediately opposite to him.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, pray mark what follows, and how it coincides with the evidence given by Pursford, who is an officer well known for his skill and integrity, and whose testimony no one will attempt to controvert.

"From the outside Pursford, the officer, saw three men enter the haunted house.

"From the inside, Turpin, the highwayman, who was hiding from his foes, saw the very same thing.

"Moreover, the description given by him of the personal appearance of these three men perfectly coincides with that given by Pursford, the officer.

"But Turpin does more. He saw the faces of the three men distinctly, and he avers they are the prisoners at the bar.

"The case against two of them, then—Norman and Sare—is quite complete and conclusive. They are sworn to by Turpin, who saw their faces at the time the murder was committed; they are sworn to by Pursford, who captured them in the act of making their escape; they are sworn to by Miss Blanche Winberry as being concerned, if not in her abduction, at any rate in her imprisonment in the house in Lambeth.

"All this accumulation of testimony must, I think, leave their guilt apparent, and therefore I will say no more about them, but proceed to sum up the evidence against Adrian Winberry, the prime mover and instigator in the whole affair."

CHAPTER CCXCVII.

THE JURY HAVE SOME LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN AGREEING UPON A VERDICT.

THE judge referred to his notes again before he entered upon this the most important portion of his whole address.

It gave the jury the opportunity of whispering to each other, and commenting upon the evidence against the two prisoners.

But the judge did not stay long, for having in his own mind no doubt whatever of the guilt of the three prisoners, he was anxious to bring this very protracted case to as early a termination as possible.

He went on in the following words—

"Gentlemen of the jury,—

"In entering upon this part of the question now under consideration, I must request you to give me your earnest and undivided attention.

"I shall commence by directing your attention to what was sworn to by the witness Maud Gouldman, as being the cause which brought Adrian Winberry into contact with his elder brother William, after so many years of separation.

"She had it from the lips of William himself, who told her that Adrian, having squandered the allowance left to him by his father, had sought him out and endeavoured to extort money from him, but he refused to listen to his application.

"Then, with that on your minds, I shall direct your attention to the account which Miss Blanche Winberry gave of the interview she had with her uncle Adrian after her abduction.

"That interview was not sought, for it was thrust upon her by her uncle. She was a prisoner confined in the garret of a house stated to be situated in Lambeth. The

account she gives of her uncle's proposal is simply this: Knowing the great love her father had for her, he had torn her from him, in order thereby to achieve his ends, which now seem not merely to extort a sum of money, but the audacious idea of inducing his brother to transfer his wealth and estates to him, reserving only an income for their support, thus, indeed, totally reversing the conditions of the father's will.

"But as I have before had occasion to remark, with most praiseworthy firmness Miss Winberry refused to do this, though threats of a sufficiently terrible nature were held out to her to make her hesitate to refuse.

"She did refuse, and now connect these two together, and the motive of Adrian Winberry appears the same.

"With these two examples, however, connect the evidence given by Turpin as to what took place in the haunted house.

"You will remember in his statement he deposed to standing at the door of the room in which the interview took place, first where he could only hear what took place, and afterwards where he could both see and hear.

"The purport of what he overheard is this. Adrian Winberry was urging his brother, then a prisoner in his hands, to sign a deed, which would make over to him all his wealth and estates, with the reservation above mentioned, and in return he was to be restored to freedom himself, and his daughter Blanche given up to him and saved from some terrible fate with which she was threatened.

"Here, then, you have Adrian Winberry sworn to by three different people, and strange to say, while they each identify his personal appearance, they at the same time show him actuated by the same motives; they have all three seen him under one aspect.

"The witness Turpin deposes that he saw the three prisoners at the bar in the room in the haunted house. The light of a lantern which was placed upon the table revealed their features fully to him.

"Two—John Norman and Richard Sare—had hold of the deceased Mr. Winberry by the arms, and kept him in his seat, while the other, Adrian Winberry, pressed him by these arguments to sign the deed of transference.

"In the end his arguments prevailed, and the elder brother affixed his signature to that document.

"No sooner had he done so than, horrible to relate, upon the evidence of this witness, Adrian drew a pistol, and blew out his brother's brains.

"Then Turpin, hearing the sounds which Pursford made in breaking in, and naturally jumping to the conclusion that his pursuers had tracked him to his hiding-place, felt that his own safety demanded his first consideration; therefore he ran upstairs, and made his escape over the roof-tops.

"One of Pursford's companions has given evidence which fully bears out this portion of the witness's story, for he was the one who pursued Turpin in the upper part of the house.

"Now if there was any doubt about this deed, that doubt must be dissipated, for behold, here is the identical deed made mention of!"

As he spoke these words the judge held up the deed, of which Mr. Skinner had so unwillingly relinquished possession.

"And mark," continued the judge, "this deed is taken from one of the witnesses for the defence—not from one for the prosecution; and mark as well, that it is signed by the two prisoners, John Norman and Richard Sare, who have all along, by the evidence of other witnesses, appeared as the accomplices of Adrian Winberry.

Gentlemen of the jury, will it please you to inspect this document?"

Thus speaking, the judge gave the deed to the usher, who passed it to the foreman of the jury.

It was handed from one to another, and carefully examined by all.

"Now this deed, it appears, by his own confession, was drawn up by one Josiah Skinner, who is now in custody upon a charge of perjury, for his evidence is nothing more than a tissue of wilful misstatements. In his cross-examination, the prosecuting counsel also elicited the fact that he had endeavoured to abate into the premises of the deceased Mr. Winberry, by the advice of his client Adrian, but that attempt, it appears, was frustrated.

"I have now to touch upon the manner in which

Adrian Winberry was apprehended, which certainly furnishes one of the most remarkable exemplifications of the means which are taken by Providence to work out its ends.

"After this I shall make some remarks upon the theory set up for the defence, and then leave the case in your hands for decision.

"You must bear in mind, then, the rather peculiar aspect which St. James's-park presented upon that particular night.

"A large number of persons were searching the park in every direction, the object of their pursuit being the capture of Dick Turpin, whom they knew to have taken refuge in it.

"Besides this, the usual exits to the park were guarded by soldiers, whose orders were to allow no one to pass out.

"This state of things, however, was known to but few persons, and certainly Adrian Winberry was not one of the few who were in the secret.

"And I must remind you, gentlemen of the jury, that if Pursford, the officer, had been one moment later than he was, he would have failed to capture the two men he took into custody, for, as already stated, they were in the very act of making their escape into the park.

"And now we have only to suppose that Adrian Winberry was the first in the flight, and that he managed to get over the palings before Pursford arrived, to account for his presence in the park.

"Being here, however, his first impulse would be to make his way to one of the gates, and he appears to have made his way in a direct line to the one situate in Spring Gardens.

"Here, however, the soldier on duty, in obedience to the orders he had received, took him into custody, and, upon the others coming up, he was carried off to Newgate.

"In the vestibule of the prison, however, the mistake that had been made was discovered, and then Adrian Winberry, declaring who he was, complained bitterly of the treatment he had received, and indignantly demanded to be set at liberty.

"This demand Mr. Cawthorn, the governor, declined to accede to, and in the midst of the dispute, Pursford, the officer, arrived with his prisoners, and then, according to his evidence, the recognition took place between them.

"Now all this, as a sequel to the rest, looks very black indeed, nor does the theory of the defence at all account for it in a satisfactory manner.

"The principal evidence, indeed, is that given by Mr. Skinner, and the tendency of that evidence is to set up an *alibi*. I cannot think, however, that it has succeeded in doing this. On the contrary, his evidence is more damaging than otherwise against the prisoners.

"This, gentlemen of the jury, is as clear a statement as I can give of this extraordinarily-involved case, which, at first sight, seems to set summary at defiance.

"With respect to the defence, the counsel employed has, I think, inclined more to utter wild and insupportable statements, none of which he, or any one else, could substantiate, than to shift the guilt from the shoulders of his client or clients—for I am not clear whether he appears on behalf of one or all three of the prisoners.

"Among these random charges, the one which needs most reference is that which charges Dick Turpin with the committing of the crime which he saw committed by another.

"To charge another person with being guilty, does not have the effect of proving the innocence of another.

"In my opinion, however, the charge is utterly groundless and ridiculous, and based upon the most improbable of suppositions, and I, in my own mind, feel quite clear that the highwayman is guiltless of that one crime, at least.

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, I conclude, and it rests with you to pronounce a verdict in accordance with your convictions. If you have any reasonable doubt about the guilt of the prisoners at the bar, your consciences and your duty compel you to give them the advantage of that doubt; but if you feel assured of their guilt, then does your duty to society at large compel you to register a verdict in accordance with that conviction."

The judge sat down.

A hail of applause greeted the termination of his address.

Considering the great length of the trial—the many and complex incidents which had been brought into it, the contradictory nature of some of the evidence, and the number of witnesses examined, he had certainly performed his onerous task with more than usual ability.

To retain all those things in the mind required a memory of no uncommon tenacity, and to produce them in a tangible shape required a clearer intellect than many could boast of possessing.

The jury conferred busily together, as though there was some diversity of opinion relative to the guilty parties.

The judge leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed. He was an old man, and the exertion he had been obliged to make had tried his energies greatly.

We may avail ourselves of this pause to take a glance at the different actors in this strange drama of human life.

In the first place, then, we will turn to the three prisoners at the bar.

They were ghastly pale.

On their stern-looking countenances there was no ray of hope.

With a fixed and burning gaze they glared into the jury-box, and watched the every movement of those twelve of their human beings with the same intentness as a cat will watch every movement of its intended prey.

Not a single glance—not a single motion, however slight, escaped their notice.

Their lives hung upon the next few moments.

If in the solitude of his prison-cell Adrian Winberry had been able to close his eyes to the awful nature of his position, assuredly he was not now. It must have pressed with full force upon his breast and brain.

What were his reflections, what tongue save his own could tell?

All noted, however, his awful haggard look and his bloodshot eyes, which never for a single instant wavered in their direction.

Then there was Maud Gouldman.

She was still in the same place as she had been when Blanche entered the court. She had not been able to move a step.

Her attention was divided between the prisoners, the jury, and Blanche.

And there was one other to whom she felt deeply thankful. One who but for whose aid her case would have been sad indeed. One whom she had, in spite of her better judgment, learned to like, and who had cast away his life for her sake.

At least, that was what the judge said, but she had better hopes, and visions which would never be realized passed through her mind.

Then there was Blanche.

With a beating heart and colourless cheek, she waited for the verdict.

Alas! poor girl, her troubles in life had begun early, and seemed likely to continue.

She had conceived a passion without knowing who he was—with the son of her father's murderer.

Unhappy fate!

It was impossible, she felt, that her dreams for the future should be realized.

Whether Adrian Winberry, her lover's father, was pronounced guilty or acquitted, would be all the same to her.

Alas! poor heart.

When, where, and how would her troubles cease?

Standing very near her was the object of her thoughts. His eyes were fixed upon her countenance occasionally with a mournful gaze, and then he would look up at the dock where his father stood and utter a bitter curse upon his evil fortune.

He knew the bar that now stood like a wall of adamant between his cousin and himself; he had, too, the bitter pang of knowing how greatly he had added to the unhappiness of her he loved, for he should never have introduced himself to her, or, at all events, have kept her for so long in ignorance of who he was, and won her purest virgin love.

CHAPTER CXXCVIII.

THE JURY RETURN A VERDICT OF GUILTY AGAINST THE THREE PRISONERS, AND RICHARD SARE MAKES A CONFESSION OF HIS GUILT.

FROM a contemplation of these proceedings we turn to our old friend Dick Turpin.

He was far from satisfied with his position.

He was in doubt, too, how the case would terminate. To be sure the judge had expressed his own convictions pretty plainly, but then the jury will not always be ruled by the judge. Indeed, their disposition would rather be to run counter to it.

And so Dick felt doubtful for the result, and those doubts rapidly increased when he found the length of time the conference continued.

Mr. Wriggles had passed Mr. Skinner into the custody of a brother-officer who happened to be near, while he himself kept a sharp look-out upon Dick, determined not to lose him this time, let things turn out how they would.

Dick treated his old foe in a very friendly manner, occasionally interchanging a whispered remark with him.

The hope that Turpin had hitherto entertained, namely, that the judge would interpose on his behalf, had quite left him. He saw that it was foolish to expect it.

But there was the mass of people who filled the court. They were all on his side, and had manifested their partiality several times.

Would they, then, assist him?

Would they prevent his capture by the myrmidons of the law?

He had slight hopes of that.

He knew how little dependence was to be placed upon a body of people.

And so he waited for the verdict, and for his own fate as well.

And now we think we have taken a glance at all in whom we feel any interest, without we include the counsel.

He for the defence sat down at his table, biting the feather end of a quill-pen in a rather disconsolate manner. Mr. Nuttall had upon his thoughtful face an expression which seemed to say, I have done my duty.

Mr. John Kersey still looked on anxiously, impatient for the verdict to be given in.

But there seemed to be a discussion of some kind or other going on among the jurymen.

At length, however, they turned round, and all sat down.

The clerk of the arraigns rose, and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury, do you find the prisoners at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

There was a moment of breathless suspense.

Literally, every one seemed to hang upon the lips of the foreman of the jury.

He was a fussy, pompous little man, and seemed to be aware of the important position in which he just then stood.

He waited, then, for every noise to subside, and when a silence of several seconds' duration had prevailed, he said, in a very important tone of voice—

"Guilty!"

Again followed that same rushing sound which we have before described.

It was caused by every one in court giving a sigh of relief.

Then some one tried to get up a cheer, but the oriers nipped it in the bud.

The prisoners did not by any outward sign show the effect which this verdict had had upon them.

The usual question whether they had anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon them was put.

Adrian Winberry tried to speak—to make a reply of some kind or other.

He moistened his lips, and endeavoured to clear his throat of something which seemed to be choking him.

"My lord, my lord!" he gasped, "I protest against the verdict of the jury. I am an innocent man, my lord, only the case has been placed in hands not competent for its conduction. I say I am innocent, innocent—quite innocent, and if I am hanged, I shall be a murdered man!"

A shudder ran through the court upon hearing this assertion, made at so awful a moment.

The judge looked at him sternly.

However, he did not speak.

One of the prisoners, however, was endeavouring to do so, or appeared to be, by the way in which his lips moved.

It was Richard Sare.

He was the youngest of the three, and there was not upon his countenance quite so hardened an expression as there was upon that of his companion.

The judge stooped down.

He knew for what object.

He fumbled about, and at length from a drawer in the pedestal before him, produced that ominous thing the black cap.

Dread, horrible, yet significant memento of past times, when the administration of justice was accompanied with very many more forms than it is now.

As he held this cap in his hand, then, previous to placing it upon his head, he saw that Richard Sare seemed about to speak.

He paused in what he was about, and asked the question—

"Have you anything you wish to say, prisoner?"

"I have, my lord."

"Say on, then."

The judge put his cap down on the top of the pedestal. The moment Sare spoke, Adrian Winberry turned round like lightning.

He seemed to read the intention of his accomplice in iniquity in his face.

Uttering a howl of rage, he sprang forward past Norman and clutched him by the throat with so violent a grip that his fingers were almost imbedded in the flesh.

Sare fell down with his antagonist upon him.

A shriek arose in the court, and then a scene of the most awful imaginable confusion ensued.

So suddenly did all this take place.

So totally unexpected was the murderer's attack that the jailers who stood in the dock to keep watch over the prisoners were thoroughly taken by surprise.

Recovering themselves from their shock of astonishment, they threw themselves upon the struggling men, and endeavoured to separate them.

After several fruitless attempts they succeeded.

Adrian Winberry seemed to divine the intention of his accomplice, and resolved to prevent him from carrying it into execution if possible.

But the jailers tore him from his prey, though not until he had almost strangled him.

Then, livid with rage, he was forced to stand up in the dock, held firmly in the grasp of two men.

A universal cry of execration greeted him the moment the people caught sight of him, and several missiles were thrown.

More dead than alive, Richard Sare was sat up in a chair.

Meanwhile, the confusion and turmoil in the body of the court increased rather than subsided.

The judge rose.

In a voice that made itself heard above every other sound, he cried—

"Unless there is instant silence, clear the court. Clear it, let the consequences be what they may, unless there is immediate and total silence! Clear the court!"

There was no doubt about the speaker being fully in earnest in what he said.

The desire to hear the termination of the trial triumphed over that to create a disturbance, and the people, one and all, became silent instantly.

Not even a murmur rose.

In the meantime some pungent essence had been held to the nostrils of the man Sare, and he had recovered somewhat.

His first act upon regaining his consciousness was to look where Adrian was standing, and when he saw his foe so well guarded he seemed to take heart.

He rose from the chair, and assisted by two of the turnkeys, stood at the front of the dock.

All could see where the talon-like fingers of Adrian Winberry had actually infixed themselves into the flesh, and tiny streams of blood trickled from several wounds.

The attack which had been made upon his life was a

sudden and desperate one, and it is much to be wondered at that it did not succeed.

"You were going to speak," said the judge, "were you not?"

"I was, my lord."

"Speak now, then."

"I wanted to make a clean breast of all this business, and I suppose Mr. Adrian guessed it, and thought to stop my voice."

"It is the most outrageous thing I ever heard of, but before you proceed to make any confession let me give you a word or two of warning. You must not forget that you have been pronounced guilty of murder by the verdict of twelve of your countrymen, and nothing now can reverse that verdict. If, however, you like to make any statements to the court you are at liberty to do so, but you must distinctly understand that nothing you can say will have a mitigatory effect upon the sentence I am about to pronounce upon you, nor can I hold out any hopes of your obtaining a commutation of that sentence."

The prisoner hesitated.

"I cannot make my situation worse by telling you what I know; can I, my lord?"

"Certainly you cannot; and if you confess your guilt you will take away any doubt there may be upon our minds as to the justice of the decision we have come to."

"I will tell you what I know, my lord; and I hope you will try to do what you can for me. You must know that about two months ago, or it may be more, Mr. Adrian Winberry came to my house in Fore-street, Lambeth, and said he had work for me to do, if I was in the humour to do it."

"How came he to know your address?"

"He had it from Mr. Josiah Skinner, my lord. Mr. Skinner recommended me to him."

"Oh! indeed. Then it seems Mr. Skinner has taken a greater part in this business than I had expected. Officers, look well to him. You have him already in custody."

Mr. Skinner's face changed to the colour of some old parchment deed which had not seen daylight for a hundred years or so.

But he made no struggle.

He had not the courage to make an attempt to preserve his own life.

The judge looked at Sare to continue.

"It's no good for me to deny it, my lord. We came to terms together, and he engaged my mate as well, who lived in the same house with me, and promised to reward us well if we would be faithful to him."

"Well?"

"Our first business was to lay in wait for Miss Blanche Winberry, and carry her off to London. We were to keep her locked up securely in the attic during the pleasure of our employer."

"And this you did?"

"Yes, my lord; we caught her in the shrubbery, as she herself says, by throwing a cloak over her head, and carrying her to a carriage. Then we drove to London."

"Go on."

"But the scheme did not seem to succeed so well as was anticipated, and another was to be tried; so me and my mate had another journey down to the hall, and, spying our opportunity, we made Mr. William Winberry a prisoner, and carried him off as well!"

"Did you take him to your house in Lambeth?"

"No, my lord; that was not judged prudent! Mr. Skinner suggested that Mr. Winberry should be taken to the haunted house in Birdcage-walk, of which he had the key, and confined there until such time as they thought fit to set him free."

"Had you, then, no idea that the unfortunate gentleman was brought to that lonely house in order to be murdered?"

"None whatever, my lord; I never dreamt such a thing as murder was intended, or I should not have had anything to do with it. When Mr. Winberry was a prisoner we paid several visits to him, and each time Mr. Adrian pressed him to sign a deed making over the property to him."

"Stop a bit. You signed that deed, did you not?"

"I did, my lord, and so did my mate. We were only to witness it. Well, sir, on the night of the twenty-seventh of the last month, we three all went to the haunted

house, and not dreaming we were watched, or that there was any one in the house, we went into the room where the prisoner was, and, as I now recollect, leaving the door ajar. The lantern was put down on the table. Me and my mate had hold of the gent by his arms, while Mr. Adrian put the deed down on the table, and asked him to sign it. At last the old chap did as he was asked, and then I thought Mr. Adrian would be satisfied, and that he had got what he wanted, but all at once he whipped a pistol out of his pocket, and before I knew what he intended to do, he fired it, and his brother lay dead on the floor!"

The auditors of this awful tale could not refrain from a groan upon hearing this horrible statement of a cold-blooded and heartless murder.

But, at a sign from the judge, the prisoner continued—

"At the moment the pistol was fired, we heard some heavy blows struck upon the front door, and we dreaded capture. Mr. Adrian told us to follow him, and that we should be all right. We were horror-struck about the murder, and spoke to him, but he cursed us for a reply, and went out of the room. I spoke to my mate, and then hearing some one coming, we thought we had better fly with all speed, which we did, but we were too late. We were captured in the garden, and brought prisoners to Newgate, and when we got there who should we find but Mr. Adrian. Of course we spoke to him, but he looked terribly angry, and made on as though he did not know us. We were all locked up, and the next day Mr. Skinner came to see us, and he said he would get us out of all the trouble if we would do as he told us, which we promised to do. Then he said we were to make on as though we did not know Mr. Adrian, but to say it was a mistake, and that we were strangers to the man who had hired us, and that we had no idea murder was meant, so we did as he told us."

"And that is a plain statement of the case, is it?"

"It is, my lord. I am ready to take my oath of it at any moment."

"Very well. Have you anything more to say?"

"No, my lord, except that neither me nor my mate knew that Mr. Adrian meant murder, and it was done so quickly there was no time for us to prevent it."

"Does your mate, as you call your fellow-prisoner, agree to the truth of what you have just said?"

"I don't know whether he will confess, my lord."

"Yes, my lord, I confess," said John Norman, "and I hope as how we shall be leniently dealt with. I am ready to take my Bible oath at any minute, that what my mate has said is quite true in every respect."

CHAPTER CCXCIX.

THE JUDGE PASSES SENTENCE OF DEATH UPON THE PRISONERS, AND MAKES AN APPEAL TO THE JURY ON BEHALF OF DICK TURPIN, WHO IS, HOWEVER, CONFINED IN A CELL IN NEWGATE.

The judge drew on the black cap.

The task he now had to perform was one from which any one would shrink.

But now that the prisoners had confessed, and added their testimony to that which had been given by the other witnesses, agreeing as it did in almost every particular, his duty was less responsible and disagreeable.

Still, it is an awful thing for one human being to doom three of his fellow-creatures to death, no matter what the circumstances may be, nor how imperatively their deaths should be called for.

In those days, however, so much was not thought of hanging a man as there is now. In the good old times, as some call them, there was always a gaping, riotous, disorderly throng round Tyburn-tree, and they were pretty sure of being presented with two or three trembling wretches, if not more.

This judge, however, as the reader cannot have failed to see by his conduct, was a man somewhat in advance of his time. He had enlightened thoughts, and took a more comprehensive view of things in general than was usual at that time.

His voice lacked firmness when he spoke, and all in the court could see the extent of his emotion.

He spoke as follows.

But, low as his voice was, there was not in all the court a single person who did not hear distinctly every word he said.

"Prisoners at the bar,—

"You have been tried by a jury of your countrymen, and have been by them decreed guilty, and I have now to conclude these proceedings by passing the last sentence of the law upon you.

"Prisoners at the bar,—You have had a long and patient trial. Every circumstance connected with the horrible tragedy of which you are decreed guilty has been carefully weighed and examined. With the justice of the verdict which the jury has returned, I may say I fully and cordially agree, more especially as since that verdict has been recorded two of you have made confessions of your guilt. The mere fact of your having done so has taken a great load off my mind, and so it must have done to the jury themselves. The painful duty I have to perform is materially lightened, and I shall have less compunction in passing sentence upon you.

"But first, I feel it to be my duty to animadvert upon the conduct of you, Adrian Winberry. The part that you have all through played in this dark drama is such as to make you hated and detested of all men. You have no excuse to make for your monstrous villainy. It appears, upon credible evidence, that you were left by your father an income quite sufficient to keep you in comfort, if not in luxury. But you thought fit to squander that income in extravagances, and then sought to extort money from your brother. Many events have been hinted at by the witnesses as to what took place at the time of your father's death, which show you in anything but a favourable light. With those events, however, we have, of course, nothing to do.

"Situated as we are with respect to yourself, it is impossible for us to say what were your intentions when you first mooted the question of money to your brother, nor are we in a position to say what passed between you on that occasion. A witness states, however, that the reason your wishes were not complied with was solely owing to the manner in which the demand was made.

"It may be that up to that time you had formed no designs upon your brother's life. It may be that during that very interview something took place or was said which roused your hatred against him. But let that be how it may, you sought to break his heart by carrying off his daughter. What were your intentions with respect to her it is out of my power to say, and perhaps always will be. Not content with this, however, you carried off the father, and confined him in a gloomy and terrible prison-house—a place which would be most calculated to exercise an effect upon the mind of the person confined in it. Then, by specious arguments, you won him to your purpose, and the deed was signed, entitling you to possess all you coveted. One would have thought that would have satisfied you, but so far from doing so, you murdered him in cold blood. Oh! it was an awful crime; so awful that the watchful eye of providence would not allow it to go unpunished. When any one begins to think of the peculiar position of affairs on that night, and the extraordinary manner in which you were captured, no one can help being struck with admiration at the manner in which one circumstance hinges upon the other. The avenging spirit was behind you, and drove you onwards blindly to destruction.

"Your crimes have been brought to light, and are about to receive their punishment. For yourself not one word in the shape of palliation can be said—there is nothing to excuse you in the least. Murder comprehends under its name various ways of taking life. The life may be taken in a moment of passion under circumstances of the utmost provocation. But you cannot plead either of these. Yours was long premeditated. That is established by the manner in which the murder was committed. You had resolved that so soon as he signed that document he should die. When your brother took the pen in his hand, yours, beneath your cloak, grasped the buttend of a pistol. You held it in your hand in such a manner as to produce it in an instant. You did so, and your brother's brains were scattered on the floor. Oh! it is a crime so horrible as to send a chill of horror through the blood of the most callous. In speaking of this fiendish crime, well could I say, in the words of one to whom the human heart and all the feelings that sway it were laid open like a book, well could I say with him—

"Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural."



[BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN VISIT DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL.]

It is a description that fully agrees with the one of which you have been found guilty. To slay a brother—to commit fratricide—to commit the crime for which Cain suffered—is indeed most unnatural under any circumstances, and most foul under the circumstances in which you slew your brother.

"Prisoners at the bar, for none of you can I hold out the slightest hope of mercy. Yet two of you, having made the confession you have, may be entitled to some commutation. But it is not for me to hold out any hopes to you. The sentence of this court upon all three of you is, that you be taken from the dock at which you stand to the place from whence you came, and from thence to the place of public execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you be dead, and may the Lord in his goodness show that mercy to your souls which we are forbidden to show to your bodies."

With these repressive words the judge concluded his remarks.

They were followed by an intense silence, for no one

after those awful words seemed to have the power of speech and motion.

But the turnkeys were the first to move.

They tapped their prisoners upon the shoulders to intimate to them that they were to prepare to go.

But the judge held up his hand for silence, and then it became evident that he had something more to say.

He turned towards the jury-box and said—

"Gentlemen of the jury—

"Before I dismiss you from your seats, I must crave your attention to some little matters connected with the trial which is just concluded.

"The first concerns Mr. Josiah Skinner, who states himself to be an attorney-at-law, though I hope, for the credit of the legal profession generally, that statement may be found to be untrue.

"I have ordered him to be taken into custody.

"From the evidence laid before us, it appears pretty clearly that he was an accessory to all that has taken place. Perhaps much of it may be due to his instigation

Still, I think I have ample grounds for committing him to take his trial."

The foreman of the jury added his head.

The officers tightened their grasp upon Mr. Skinner.

The judge continued.

"The next point upon which I wish to address you is that of one of the witnesses for the prosecution, who came forward in a very singular manner and under very extraordinary circumstances to give his evidence.

"Of course, gentlemen of the jury, I allude to no other person than the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin.

"It is not, I imagine, necessary for me to dwell upon the manner in which he entered the witness-box.

"But as he lies open to the charge which my learned brother for the defence has brought against him, I think it will be best for me to revert to his behaviour on the present occasion.

"Above all ought these facts to be borne in mind.

"He is a highwayman, and an offender against the laws, for which reason one would scarcely look to find in him any of the virtues and refined feelings which might be expected from one holding a respectable position in society.

"But, nevertheless, let that be as it may, it seems there are certain ranks and differences in crime, and that there are some of so atrocious a character as to fill the mind of a highwayman with horror.

"And if you will all bear in mind, though the fact ought not to be admitted in extenuation or palliation of their deeds, it is, however, certain that a certain degree of romantic generosity is always ascribed to knights of the road, as they are popularly called.

"For the moment, I cannot recall an instance in which a case has been brought before me of a highwayman committing any further offence against the person than that of robbery, and during the evidence the defending counsel has always elicited that the robbery was unaccompanied with any violence whatever.

"From this it would not be going too far to infer that there exists in the breasts of these depredators generally a kind of wild, lawless, chivalric spirit, such as might have belonged to the knights errant of the middle ages, between whom and the knights of the road of our own day there is less difference than many people imagine.

"Such, then, being the case, it is not difficult to believe that Dick Turpin, highwayman as he is, was horror-struck when he saw the atrocious crime committed in the manner which has been described to you in evidence.

"Some concatenation of events, unnecessary to be described here, brought him, it seems, into contact with the members of the family of the murdered man.

"He would see their grief and the unutterable woe which the mysterious disappearance of the head of the house would cause in the hearts of all his descendants.

"Then he would know that he alone was a witness of the awful crime—that his evidence alone could complete the conviction of the murderers.

"But how was he to come forward?

"Too well would he be aware that a price was set upon his head, that the officers of the law were in search of him, and that, if he disclosed himself, his capture and incarceration would inevitably follow.

"But we see that this all-important consideration did not triumph over his desire to do justice to the family of the murdered man, and accordingly he has stood before us to-day in his true character, and stated upon oath all the particulars with which he was acquainted.

"And let not too light a value be set upon his coming forward.

"By some it will be urged that he could have escaped apprehension, but that I beg leave to doubt.

"It is a matter of notoriety and public comment that, for a very long time past, all efforts which have been made to take him into custody have proved unsuccessful.

"And from one little event which has happened in connection with his presence in this court, I am inclined to infer that all attempts would have been equally unsuccessful for a long time to come.

"The fact to which I allude is this.

"To-day being a day appointed for trial, this courtroom and all the passages contiguous to it are thronged with spectators and officials belonging not only to Newgate, but the various police-officers.

"Such being the case, then, who would for a moment

have thought it possible that Dick Turpin, the well-known highwayman, should, undisguised, have made his way in with the rest, unrecognised and undetected.

"This, in my judgment, speaks volumes in favour of the supposition that for a length of time to come he would have been successful in defying capture by the police.

"For my own part, it seems impossible for any one to have been single-minded enough to have acted in the manner in which he has acted.

"That he should expect some consideration to be shown him is, I think, only natural; and I much regret that it is not in my power to hold out protection to him—but I am powerless to do so.

"Nor by a detractor could it be said that he came here ignorant of the consequences to himself.

"He was in the court and was expressly warned before he came forward as a witness what would be the certain consequence of his doing so.

"But this did not have the effect of keeping him back or of causing him even to hesitate.

"He gave his evidence clearly and satisfactorily, and the moment he stepped out of the witness-box he was arrested by an officer of police, in whose custody he still remains.

"And now I wish to refer to the charge which has been brought against him by the counsel for the defence.

"He broadly and unconditionally accuses him of having committed the murder himself.

"But, gentlemen of the jury, a moment's consideration will be sufficient to convince you of the utter absurdity of this accusation.

"It seems impossible to all of you, I am sure, that any one could have acted in the manner in which I have described Dick Turpin acting.

"But if this is your opinion, should you not think it more impossible still—admitting for a moment that impossibility admits of comparison—I say, gentlemen of the jury, should you not have considered it still more impossible for a man placed as Dick Turpin is to commit a murder and then come into the witness-box at the sacrifice of his own life, in order to give false witness against another?

"The one case I have put to you can be ascribed to a kind of romantic chivalronsness, but the other is totally beyond all the bounds of sense and reason.

"What my learned friend the counsel for the defence will bring forward in support of his accusation it is not for me to say; but if the charge was, as I expect, brought forward without anything to substantiate it, I should recommend him to withdraw his accusation before the matter proceeds any further."

CHAPTRE CCC.

THE PEOPLE IN THE COURT MAKE AN UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO RESCUE DICK TURPIN.

THERE was a faint hum of approval from the body of the people in the court when his lordship thus spoke, and all looked curiously towards the counsel for the defence in order to see what notice he would take of the appeal.

He rose to his feet and the judge remained silent, in order to afford him an opportunity to speak.

"My lord," he said, "since you have been pleased to allow me a chance to retract what I have said, I beg to take it, and therefore say, once and for all, that I individually draw back from the accusation."

The counsel sat down.

His lordship resumed his remarks.

"I think you have acted very wisely. And now, gentlemen of the jury, I will not detain you above a moment longer.

"Dick Turpin is now free from the charge of the murder of Mr. William Winberry, but I have yet a word or two more to say respecting him.

"It was not solely with a view of allowing my learned brother for the defence an opportunity of retracting his charge that I addressed myself to you.

"This highwayman has rendered signal service to society at large by the manner in which he has acted in this trial, and has set an example worthy to be followed.

"Under such circumstances, then, I think some steps ought to be taken in his behalf. I, for my own part, shall interest myself to the utmost in his favour, and all that I can do, I may safely say, shall be done. I trust my example

will be followed by all those who have taken an active part in to-day's proceedings."

Another round of applause, which made the roof of the court ring again, followed this speech.

The judge continued.

"At present I have no alternative but to leave him in the hands of the officer who has taken him into custody, and I think it will not be out of place to give him a few words of advice as to the manner in which he conducts himself."

Then, looking at Dick, and addressing himself more particularly to him, he went on—

"Let me advise you," he said, "to make no resistance. Such a proceeding could not possibly be attended with any good results, or I should be the first to censure it, for your behaviour has filled me, if no one else, with the utmost admiration. Submit quietly. You will be taken to a cell in Newgate, but that you must put up with. While you are there, I trust you will create no disturbance, and rest assured that every exertion will be made to obtain some amount of leniency from the crown on your behalf."

"I cannot promise anything, however. The jury I have retained in their seats, in the endeavour to interest them on your behalf also. And, now, attend to my last words. Do nothing to aggravate the charges which have been made against you. Remain for awhile passive, until you learn that the exertions made for you have proved unavailing."

Dick bowed to indicate his consent to what the judge had just said.

"I have now a few words to say to those who have met here to-day as spectators and auditors of this strange trial."

"Throughout the course of the investigation I have noticed that you have all greeted the witness of whom I have been speaking with a considerable degree of favour."

Whenever you saw an opportunity of applauding him, you seized upon it, in defiance of the rules and regulations of this court."

"This breach of the peace, however, we will pass over, and come to the point upon which I wish to address you."

"From the manifestations spoken of, it has occurred to me as not being unlikely that you would not think it right for this witness to be detained a prisoner, and that consequently you would attempt his rescue."

"For the sake, not only of him, but also of yourselves, let me treat you not to make an attempt to interpose between the law and its victim."

"If you, however, persist in making the attempt, you will be sure to be defeated, and not only will you accomplish no good in that way, but you will also render nugatory those efforts which I have pledged myself to make."

"Therefore, leave this court in peace and quietness, even as you entered it, and if any of you have decided upon the rash undertaking, rescind that decision ere any harm be done."

As the judge concluded these words, he leaned back again in his chair.

Just for about a moment no one in the court moved hand or foot.

Then the jury, no doubt glad enough to be released from their protracted sitting, got up and proceeded to leave the box.

Next the turnkeys took away the three prisoners in the dock.

A few persons noticed that, while attention was attracted by these movements, the judge hastily wrote something on a slip of paper, and passed it to Mr. Wriggles.

That worthy functionary, as soon as he received it, nodded his head with a pompous air.

Then he whispered to Dick—

"Step this way. His lordship wishes to speak to you."

What could Dick do but obey this mandate?

The judge had certainly throughout behaved in a most considerate manner towards him, and it would have looked very ungrateful to have refused so gentle a request.

Immediately upon passing the note, the judge retired to the little room immediately behind him, admittance to which was gained by a heavy curtain.

Dick did not for a moment hesitate to accompany Mr. Wriggles.

The distance they had to go was short.

Therefore, almost before any one perceived the movement, he was out of sight, for, as soon as the curtain was raised and he passed through, it was allowed to fall into its place again.

The people in the court had not offered to stir.

Had it not been for the last words the judge had uttered, they would assuredly have come and all sprung forward to the rescue of our hero.

As it was, they were undecided and hung back, pondering the while on what had been said to them.

And it was during this momentary indecision that Dick passed out of their sight.

Then some one among the crowd cried—

"Hurrah for Dick Turpin, and down with the police! Fetch him out, friends! Never mind what the judge says; he isn't king. We won't have the bold highwayman scragged! Three cheers, mates, for Dick Turpin, and then we will set him free!"

The three cheers were given with startling effect, and then, like a mighty torrent, the crowd pushed forward.

But it was in vain they surged to and fro. They found themselves everywhere opposed by the officers, who poured into the crowded space from every imaginable point.

A furious contest ensued.

Then one or two of the populace, more daring than the rest, sprang on to the judge's bench.

They were soon followed by others.

Then, with a dash, they reached the curtain.

One hasty snatch, and it lay in a mass at their feet.

There was nothing now to bar their entrance to the little room.

They dashed into it.

But to their astonishment and dismay, the place was empty.

Not a soul was in it.

There was a small arched door opposite to where they entered, and towards this they made a rush as soon as they realized that Dick had really gone.

It was fast.

But that was an obstacle that they resolved to overcome.

They made a simultaneous dash at it.

There was a creak and a crash, and then the door gave way.

It opened into a narrow arched passage, and the first discovery the mob made after the door was broken down was that this passage was literally choked up with officers, who did not wait to be attacked, but pressed forward to disperse the mob.

But this was not so easily done.

Mobs are obstinate.

And especially so when they are opposed.

Now all this opposition which they had already met with only served to stimulate them to an extraordinary degree, and they were more than ever determined to accomplish their object.

But there seemed little hope of success.

The numbers of the police kept continually augmenting.

Some of them, too, adopted a rather novel and curious, but very effective, method of clearing the court.

These were the officers who stood nearest the doors.

Their plan was this.

They would make a dart into the court, and seize some individual and drag him out.

Then he was handed to another and another, through numerous passages, until he suddenly found himself propelled into the Old Bailey.

It was really wonderful to see with what expedition this was performed.

To be sure, only one was taken out at a time, and a great many ones filled the court, but then the process was prosecuted with so much rapidity that its effects very soon became perceptible.

Then those officers who were in the passage, pressing forward in a phalanx, soon forced those who were in the judge's private room out on to the bench again, and off the bench into the court.

Here, however, the mob made a bold and determined stand, resolved not to give up the accomplishment of their purpose without one more struggle.

The scene that ensued baffles description.

Mingled with the mob were many who took no part in their disorderly proceedings, but who, nevertheless, suffered severely from them.

From these arose loud shrieks and cries as the mob swept

as, then might be counted several with whom the reader is acquainted.

For instance, Blanche Winberry and her lover and Maud Gouldman, as well as Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey.

They were all inextricably involved in the general confusion—for what chance did they have of leaving the court?

It was in vain they tried to maintain a stand or a position in one place—the effort was altogether a useless one. They were drifted hither and thither with the crowd.

The pressure at times was fearful.

And still the infuriated people fought manly with the police, although they could not gain any possible advantage either to themselves or any one else by so doing.

With an exertion of considerable strength and agility, young Adrian Winberry, who had never left the side of Blanche for a single moment, climbed up into the jury-box.

This was a place of refuge.

If he could manage to get Blanche there, she would be perfectly safe.

He held down his arms, therefore, and the instinct of preservation made the poor girl seize his hands.

She took a firm hold, and then, to his infinite joy, Adrian succeeded in drawing her fairly into the jury-box, and placing her on one of the seats.

Then he held down his arms for Maud, who was clinging with all the desperation which despair and terror could give her to the woodwork.

Mr. Nuttall was near her.

It was observable that from the first commencement of the disturbance he had left his seat at the table and placed himself beside her, shielding her as much as he was able from the rude assaults of the crowd.

And now, when he saw what young Adrian Winberry was about, and that the jury-box would be a place of security, he raised Maud in his arms and assisted her to reach the young man.

In another moment she was beside Blanche and in safety.

The mob still continued its vain efforts.

The people who composed it were wound up to the utmost desperation, and they were quite blind and heedless of what they were about.

The police-officers, however, who were armed with staves, laid about them in good earnest.

But the numbers were too great for them to be able even by this means to make a rapid impression.

Every movable article within the place was overturned.

The benches and seats were broken up to fragments, and were either hurled about the room or used as weapons for defence.

Officers and people were struck to the ground every moment, and the dismal groans they uttered, and the shrieks and yells which came from their lips, all combined to make this terrible scene still more horrible.

It might have been that Dick took it as a demonstration of popular feeling on his behalf, but the worst of it was it offered him no advantage.

At length, however, the officers succeeded in quelling the disturbance, and the ringleaders of the riot were taken into custody.

The others, who were unwounded, made their escape in the best way they could.

Then all that remained were the wounded on the floor, who were unable to crawl away.

The police achieved a victory, but not without a very severe struggle.

When the court was clear, Maud and Blanche expressed their wish to leave it.

Young Adrian Winberry, who looked really heart-broken, went to the door of the jury-box, and, opening it, allowed them to pass out.

Mr. Nuttall and Mr. Kersey were there waiting to receive them.

Blanche was very pale.

She was terrified by the awful scene of tumult which she had just witnessed, and could not control her agitation.

As she passed him, Adrian just bowed to her, and that was all.

He did not descend himself.

Blanche appeared scarcely conscious of it.

Mr. Kersey offered her his arm, and Mr. Nuttall offered his to Maud.

Thus escorted they made their way out of the court.

Mr. Kersey hailed a hackney coach, and directed the driver to take the whole party to his house in Red Lion-square.

They reached this place in safety, and, having paused a little while to rest and refresh themselves, Shockley was called, and the carriage brought to the door.

Mr. Kersey undertook to see to all future matters, and to communicate all he heard from time to time to them.

With this understanding they parted.

Shockley drove direct to the Hall.

Inside the carriage Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman sat clasping each other's hands.

Scarcely in all the world could have been found two sadder hearts than theirs.

Both were weeping.

Weeping silently, and for different causes.

Neither had the power to address the other.

And so, in silence and in tears, they leaned back in the carriage as it rolled upon its way towards the Hall.

Here for the present we must leave them, but, ere long, we shall return, for this strange episode in the life of our hero is not yet over.

These two young girls, now so doubly left alone, will be again introduced to the reader under circumstances both strange and perilous.

It is hoped that an interest is felt in their varying and cruel fortunes.

Alas! that it should be so; their troubles are not over yet.

CHAPTER CCCL.

DICK TURPIN IS LEFT IN THE CELL TO MEDITATE UPON HIS PROSPECTS AND POSITION.

LEAVING, then, these two fair and unhappy girls to continue their journey towards their desolate home, we will return to Dick Turpin, and relate what took place after his obeyal of the request made by the judge.

Dick assented to it without hesitation, because, from the whole tenor of his words and actions, he could tell that his lordship was favourably disposed towards him, and that he had nothing to fear in the shape of treachery and harm from him.

Therefore Turpin followed Mr. Wiggles very willingly.

The distance he had to go was very short. A dozen steps, indeed, brought him to the curtain, which served the purpose of a door.

It was drawn aside, and he entered with his captor.

He found himself face to face with the judge, who was standing with one arm resting upon the back of a chair of elaborate and antique workmanship.

Besides himself, there was only one person in the room.

That was Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate.

As the reader knows, this worthy had filled the office he now held for a limited time only.

Upon the occasion of the suspension of Mr. Tapner, owing to the extraordinary behaviour of that intemperate individual while Tom King was in custody, it will be recollected he was placed in the situation temporarily, during the inquiry which was made into Mr. Tapner's conduct.

That investigation, however, terminated in the way in which it ought to have terminated.

Mr. Tapner was dismissed.

The next step, of course, was to appoint a new and permanent governor in his stead.

Applications were numerous, but owing to the influence he had with those in whom the appointment rested, Mr. Cawthorn gained the situation, and he had ever since retained it.

There was nothing particular to be said against him. He was a stern, strict man, but yet not unjustly rigorous towards the prisoners under his care.

They were, however, well looked after, and every precaution was taken in order to prevent them making their escape.

Indeed, Mr. Cawthorn is fairly entitled to the name of

being one of the very first governors who made an attempt to reclaim the abuses of Newgate, which had hitherto enjoyed unchecked growth.

Mr. Cawthorn, then, and the judge were the only two persons present in the little ante-chamber when Turpin entered.

He made a profound bow to the judge, for he could not help feeling a respect for him.

The lordship kindly returned the salutation, and then said—

"Turpin, I have sent for you here in order that you might quietly surrender up yourself, and be taken to your cell. I more than anticipate some misguided attempt to rescue you may be made by your friends in the court. I should be glad to avoid it, if I could, and I trust you will assist me. If those without do attempt your rescue, they cannot succeed, so strong is the muster of police-officers assembled within these walls to-day. Your capture is inevitable; therefore, take my advice—give in quietly. Not only would all the resistance you could make prove futile, but it would be offensive to me. I do not like to say too much of myself, but still, as you must know well enough, I have power and influence. I will give you my word to exert both of them to the utmost in your behalf; I will promise that your conduct in this day's affair shall be represented in the proper quarter in a proper light. Nothing shall be overlooked. I consider myself bound to do this for the manner in which, up to the present time, you have behaved. I give you now into the hands of Mr. Cawthorn. He is already acquainted with all the particulars, and, moreover, knows what my intentions are. Therefore, from him you may expect to receive nothing but proper treatment. Accompany him. He will place you in a cell, but his duty compels him to do that. Your stay in it, however, I hope will be brief; and now, farewell; I hope you understand all that I have said, and I further hope that you will not mar what I am doing in your behalf by any injudicious attempt to escape from your confinement."

"I am deeply indebted to your lordship," said Dick; "I feel it better than I can express it. I will carefully attend to all your wishes; not one of them shall be disobeyed. More than once I have said that I would never yield myself a prisoner with life—that I would never be taken except in death; but I feel these circumstances are so exceptional, that I should be justified in foregoing that determination; and therefore, my lord, I am quite willing to do all that you request."

The judge was pleased with this reply, and made a sign to Mr. Cawthorn, which that individual immediately understood.

He came close up to Dick and said—

"I am ready. Follow."

Dick readily complied, for he judged it was the best policy to do so.

Mr. Wriggles, however, with a rather puzzled expression upon his countenance, kept close by his side, determined not to lose sight of him until he was safely placed in a cell.

If Dick had tarried a moment longer than he had, the people would have forced themselves upon him at the interview.

As it was he got out just in time.

The door was closed.

The passage filled up with officers.

The judge accompanied the procession a little way down the passage, and then he turned off to the left.

The governor of Newgate, Mr. Wriggles, some few turnkeys, and Dick Turpin took the high-road to the cells.

Mr. Cawthorn was pleased immensely to think he had at last got the notorious highwayman, Dick Turpin, in custody.

Accordingly, he straddled on before in the most pompous manner conceivable.

No fetters of any description were placed upon Dick, and during their progress to the cells, Mr. Wriggles chose to make a remark about it.

"Ah! Dick," he said, "you are a lucky fellow. You are inside Newgate at last, but it's without any bother, and without any jewelry upon your person. Ah! well, it isn't every highwayman that has the head bent on his side. But I am afraid you have done too much to get off very easily, but still it can be tried."

"So it can," replied Dick, "but, as I said just now, I should never have yielded myself up under other circumstances, for I had made up my mind to fight to the last, and never to give in till death."

"You are a brave chap, Dick, and I like you."

"Like me?"

"In common I do. I wish all was like you. But some are sneaks. They talk about the time coming when there will be no highwaymen, but, if it does, what will the officers have to do?"

"Ah! what indeed? I never thought of that before."

"Very likely not. But, thank goodness, that event is not very likely to take place, either in your time or mine, so leave it, I say, for those who come after us."

Dick was silent.

But Mr. Wriggles went on—

"Dick, you're a trump. A regular trump. The more I think, the more I think so, and, if you come to grief, it will break my heart, there now."

"Silence," said Mr. Cawthorn, coming to a halt.

"Smithson, where are you?"

"Here, sir."

"Open this door."

"Yes, sir."

The door to which the governor was alluding, was a massive-looking one, deeply set in the wall.

There were others of a similar kind beyond it.

Smithson was the name of one of the turnkeys.

He took from his pocket a huge bunch of keys, and, applying one of them to the door, opened it.

The whole party walked in.

As Dick had expected, the door led into a cell.

It was a large one, and doubtless, for a cell, very comfortable.

The last rays of daylight found their way into it when they entered, and allowed Dick the opportunity of seeing what his prison was like.

The first glance did not prepossess him.

But scarcely had he betaken that glance, than the daylight which had illumined the cell faded away.

Immediately it became involved in obscurity.

"My orders," said Mr. Cawthorn, "are that I should not place any fetters upon you."

Dick bowed.

"But I think you ought not to be left thus. Still, will you give me your word of honour that you will not attempt to escape?"

"What I said to the judge I will certainly stick to," replied Dick; "and, as for asking me for any more, it's no good at all."

Very well—very well. I know what that means. I have received instructions not to put any irons upon you, and don't choose to disobey it. But, for all that, I shall take a few precautions of a different kind to make sure you do not escape."

"That you are quite at liberty to do. I hope you won't allow me to interfere with any of your projected arrangements."

"Here you are, then, and here you will remain for the present. I am quite ready to stake my life about that."

"I should advise you not to be rash, Mr. Cawthorn. There is no knowing what may happen."

"I know this, though," said the governor.

"Know what?"

"Why, that you are in a cell under my charge, and here you will remain until you are either taken out for a ride, or I receive an order for your release."

"Very well. I have no objection."

"Will you give me your word of honour, then, that you will not attempt to escape?"

"Certainly not. I made the judge a promise in your presence."

"And shall you keep to it?"

"Certainly I shall."

"That is quite enough, then. But I am suspicious of you."

"So it seems," said Dick, "but I can't help that. You are master here, and can do as you like."

Mr. Cawthorn was evidently far from easy in his mind about his prisoner.

He well knew the world-wide notoriety he had obtained, and how the intelligence of his incarceration in Newgate would disperse itself over the length and breadth of the land.

The means which had been taken to secure this notorious offender were well known, and also that hitherto every scheme had met with signal failure.

If now, after he had been safely lodged in prison, he was to make his escape from thence, Mr. Cawthorn thought, and justly, too, that he would not for long afterwards retain the situation he had been so desirous of gaining.

Hence, then, his anxiety, which was greater than it seemed, and much greater than he liked to acknowledge, even to himself.

Dissatisfied with the replies Dick gave him, and puzzled and perplexed as to what would be the best thing for him to do, Mr. Cawthorn left the cell.

Mr. Wriggles and the other prison officials of course followed him.

The door was closed, and the governor secured it himself.

The care he took to see that the bolt of the lock shot properly into the box provided for it, and that the bolts fitted securely into their sockets, was almost ludicrous to behold.

Then, last of all, he saw the strong iron bar put up, which went in a slanting direction across the door.

This done, he gave a last glance, and took his departure, leaving, however, one of the men outside the cell in the passage, as a sentinel or guard.

Somewhat relieved in his mind, but not with his heart altogether at rest, the governor made his way to his own apartments in the prison.

As soon as the door was closed, Dick turned round, and made another effort to look around him.

Darkness was deepening rapidly, but his eyes were accustomed themselves to the obscurity.

In one corner, just under the little grated aperture which served for a window, was a rude kind of pallet or bed.

Towards this he walked and sat himself down upon it.

From this point he endeavoured to survey his cell, but the outlines of it were so indistinct that he found the effort was a futile one, and he determined to postpone it until daylight.

Having come to this decision, he changed his sitting posture for a recumbent one.

Then his brain became crowded with numberless thoughts.

He was alone, and he found it some relief to mutter his thoughts aloud.

"And so," he said, "I am at last, really and truly, where I had made up my mind I never would be—in the interior of a cell in Newgate—a prisoner. I, who have defied the officers so long, that they must have considered it quite a hopeless task to capture me—yet here I am."

"But what a strange series of events have brought me here! They surpass, in strong and sustained interest, all that I ever read or heard. Certainly, nothing like it has ever before happened to me."

"I have made some friends, that is quite conclusive, and, I hope, friends who have power and influence, which they will exert to the utmost to get me out of this present difficulty. But I wonder what conditions they will attach to it?"

"I like the judge. He seems an upright, honourable man, and very different to many who now sit upon the bench. I must esteem myself lucky that he presided on this occasion. Had it not been so, I should not have fared so well as I have. I have given him my word that I will not escape, and I will keep it, even if I was free to walk out of Newgate this moment. If he fails in what he is going to try to do, well and good; I shall then be absolved from that promise, and shall be able to meditate upon escape, for something seems to tell me that I am not near the end of my career."

"I think he will keep his word with me. I don't think I ought to doubt him. I will not show soon first whether he really was interesting himself in my behalf."

"How strange it seems for me to be here! I can scarcely realize my position! How strange, too, are the circumstances which brought me here! I cannot help thinking about that. I cannot dismiss it from my mind. During the trial, too, it came home to me very forcibly. To think that the simple fact of my taking refuge in that haunted house, at the particular time I did should have produced such wonderful results!"

"I might have gone there earlier or later than I did, in either of which cases I should never have known anything."

"How strangely, too, was the capture of Adrian Winberry effected! Upon any other night, at any other time, he would have been free to leave the park unnoticed and unquestioned, and then he would have escaped the righteous doom which has overtaken him."

"Then there is Maud Gouldman. How wonderful I should meet with her as I did. Maud—Maud. Beautiful Maud—I wish!"

Dick was suddenly interrupted in his meditations by hearing some one rattle the door of his cell.

CHAPTER CCCC.

RELATES HOW THE FRENCH GENDARMES ATTACKED THE RUINED MILL IN WHICH TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAD TAKEN REFUGE.

BEFORE we proceed to relate who it was that thus sought an entrance to Dick Turpin's cell so soon after he had become an inmate of it, we must revert to some events of a wild and startling nature which were taking place elsewhere.

Doubtless the reader would much rather not be left in suspense, but, unfortunately, it is unavoidable.

As soon as we possibly can, however, we will return to our hero.

It will be recollected that, since the commencement of the long trial we have just concluded, the narrative has met with no interruption.

This proceeded from two causes.

One was because the author desired to place the whole of the trial before his readers in such a manner that their attention should never once be diverted from it by other incidents.

For this reason, many interruptions which actually did take place in the proceedings were passed over in silence.

But, now that the trial is over, we must remind the reader of the length of time their undivided attention has been given to Dick, to the exclusion of other characters in the history.

But now that he is in Newgate.

Now that some little time must elapse before he can do anything but sit there supinely awaiting the progress of events, we feel certain that a better opportunity of leaving him could not be found.

Moreover, in order to understand subsequent events, it is necessary that we should turn our attention elsewhere.

And so, while he is half sitting up upon his pallet, watching the door to see who was about to enter, we will leave him, and return to Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

It will be remembered that the three highwaymen were making the best of their way to Calais, in order to get a boat there of some kind or other, so as to cross over to Dover.

But they had the ill-luck to be closely and hotly pursued by a large party of gendarmes.

They had, however, urged their jaded horses to the utmost, until, upon reaching the top, the horses of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack dropped exhausted to the ground.

Tom King was mounted, and the hill having been ascended, his steed would doubtless be able to carry him down it, and this his two friends urged him to attempt, and so escape, leaving them to do the best they could.

But Tom King, with that rare generosity which formed so prominent a trait in his character, refused to do so.

He resolved that, if his comrades were captured, he would be captured with them.

So he alighted instantly, for there was not a moment to spare, their foes being close behind them, and releasing the bridle of his horse, he sent him off at a gallop down the hill.

The three leaped over a low wooden fence which skirted a meadow.

Before them, in the darkness, they could just distinguish the outlines of some building, which, upon a nearer approach, they found to be a ruined windmill.

From its very dilapidated condition, they judged they would not have much trouble in obtaining an entrance to it.

And in this expectation they were not disappointed. But if they got in so easily, was it a good place in which to take shelter?

That was the thought that occurred to our friends.

A moment's reflection served to answer it.

It was not a good place for shelter, and yet they would stand a better chance in an encounter with their foes than they would have done without any shelter at all.

Besides, there was just a chance, and no more, that they might not be tracked there by the gendarmes.

However, there was no time to spare for deliberation, so, after scrambling over an immense quantity of rubbish, they fairly crawled into one of the chambers in the mill.

It was through a small aperture like a window that they made their way, and was quite high up in the building, which was buried to a depth of several feet in the rubbish that had from time to time accumulated round it.

The first thing they did, after rising to their feet, was to go to this place and look out, in the hope of being able to catch a glimpse of their foes.

Nor were they defeated in their expectation.

Just dimly visible as a something darker than the night sky was the troop of gendarmes.

They must have been standing in a group together.

Doubtless they were looking about them for some trace of their prey, or listening for some sound to come to their ears which would indicate their whereabouts.

Then they scattered themselves—some leaping their horses over the fence into the meadow.

Suddenly there arose a shout from this portion of the party, and our friends, though they were too far off to hear the words, could tell by the tone that they had noticed the windmill.

And the next movement on the part of the gendarmes showed them that this supposition was a correct one.

The cry we have mentioned was responded to by another from those on the high-road, and then the remainder of the troop jumped over the fence and rejoined their companions.

Frenchmen are always fond of gesticulation and vociferation, and the chattering that now ensued baffled all description.

Rather anxiously our three friends peeped out of the window in the mill, and watched their actions.

A word of command was given in a loud voice, and then the whole body came at full gallop up to the windmill.

Of course, being mounted, they reached it in much less time than our friends did, who were on foot.

But, before they came near enough to hear what they were about, the three friends busied themselves with blocking up the window through which they had been peeping, with some pieces of timber and other rubbish which they found convenient to their hands.

Then a rapid exploration of the building seemed to show that there was but that one opening through which admission could be gained.

But, so frail was the whole of the building, that very little trouble would enable the gendarmes, well armed as they were, to cut an entrance into it, for the body of the mill was composed of nothing but planks of wood.

Just as they finished blocking up the aperture all but a small hole, which was reserved for the purpose of reconnoitering the enemy, the troop dashed up to the mill and surrounded it.

A few moments elapsed, during which the men were posted round the mill so as to form a perfect chain, and some one in command made a loud speech in French to the fugitives.

All three of our friends being well acquainted with the tongue, Tom King from education, and Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval from residence in the country, they could tell what was said.

It was nothing more in substance than an appeal to surrender themselves prisoners for the glory of *la belle France, la grande nation*.

But, of course, our friends took no notice of this; they were hardly the sort of men to do so.

When this officer had finished his harangue, he waited patiently for a minute or two for a response, and then gave the order to his men to attack the mill.

They began by climbing up on the heap of rubbish round it, and battering the woodwork with the butt end of their guns.

It was old and rotten, and a few vigorous blows would soon make a breach for them to crawl through.

Being on the inside, our friends could tell exactly which was the spot the dragoons were attacking.

That point, then, must be defended.

A very ready and ingenious means suggested itself to them.

The machinery of the mill was, for the most part, lying in a confused mass upon the floor.

It was composed of heavy pieces of iron and stone, and they set about placing them against that part of the wall of the mill which the gendarmes were trying to batter in.

This made a vast difference.

Their blows no longer produced the effect they did at first.

It did not seem, however, that they suspected what had been done, for they continued their attack with unabated vigour.

Doubtless they suspected that they had come upon some part of the mill that was stronger and better able to resist them.

But they persevered, and our friends soon saw to their dismay that this would not avail them much longer.

But the same voice which had before called out now did so again.

The men who were attacking desisted from their attempt.

Then followed another demand for our friends to surrender.

But, as before, they took no notice of it.

This seemed to enrage the official personage, for, in a very intemperate voice, he said—

"Fire!"

The command was followed by a little delay, and then a rattling discharge of musketry took place, which was directed to every part of the building.

It was a wonder our friends could be in the building and escape injury, but they did.

The bullets flew around them in every direction, but did them no injury.

This discharge over, the attack was resumed while the others reloaded.

Claude Duval felt in his pockets, and produced a small dark lantern, which he ignited.

His comrades looked at him in silence.

"It will never do to stay here," he said. "Those gendarmes seem terribly in earnest. We must make our escape somehow."

"But how?" asked Tom and Jack.

"That is the question. We shall certainly never find an answer to it by standing here doing nothing. I will look about me."

"Be careful of yourself!"

"All right; but we must either get away from here somehow or other, or else wait and be comfortably shot or captured."

"But I can't see any means of getting away," said Ten King; "and if we do get out, we shall not be any better off than we were at first before we got in."

"I don't know; but we can't do worse than stop here. Ah! what is that? a ladder?"

"Yes, but it leads up to the top of the mill."

"Never mind, we may find something."

Claude Duval ran to the foot of the ladder, and hastily ascended it.

It led up to a trap-door, which he pushed open.

Then he found himself in the top chamber of the old mill.

Passing through the trap-door, he got on to the floor of the upper chamber.

His two comrades, after pausing a moment, followed him.

The chamber was encumbered with machinery, and it was also much smaller in size than the one that was beneath it.

There was a small hole on one side, and upon going to this, our friends saw that the piece of wood supporting the sails passed through it.

Their enemies were beneath.

"Here is a chance of alarming our foes," said Sixteen-String Jack. "They are immediately underneath these long sails. Let us cut away this rotten beam of wood, and allow them to fall down upon them!"

"Agreed!"

"Help me, then, both of you, and we will soon do the business."

Claude hung the lantern, by a contrivance with which it was provided, to his belt, and then all three drew their swords and began hacking away at the rotten beam of wood.

As Jack had said, the wood was rotten, so an impression was easily made upon it.

The centre gave them the most trouble, for there the wood was more sound.

But in less than five minutes the beam was completely severed, and then the sails, having nothing to support them, gave way.

They went down with a tremendous crash, carrying away a portion of the top and side of the old mill with them.

There was a shout from the soldiers beneath, and they hastened to get away, being impressed with the idea that the ruinous old building was about to fall bodily upon them.

For a few moments there was a scene of unutterable confusion, and then by degrees they gradually recovered from their panic.

Some suspicion as to the truth of what had occurred crossed their minds, for the officer again gave the command to fire, and nearly all the shots were aimed at the top portion of the mill.

But our three friends, having produced this consternation in the ranks of their foes, took all the advantage of it they could.

Claude instantly renewed his explorations, and a cry from his lips had the effect of calling his two comrades to his side.

"Look here," he said.

He pointed as he spoke to a rude flight of steps, which seemed to descend to a great distance into the interior of the mill.

"Pat that is going down again," said Jack.

"I know it," replied Claude, "but it does not take us into the same part as that from which we have just descended. I am in hopes now we shall either get away or else find some place of security."

"I hope we shall."

"Follow me, then, and we will make the attempt."

"The gendarmes seem rather alarmed at what we have done."

"They do, and that will give us all the better chance of escape."

"I am afraid their panic will not last very many minutes."

"Never mind. It has lasted, you see, until we have got to the bottom of the steps."

"And no longer," replied Tom. "Hark."

At this moment they heard the order given to fire, and when such deadly and particular aim had been taken at the upper portion of the mill.

"And lucky for us we descended when we did," said Claude Duval, "for, if we had been above, we could not have escaped that murderous fire. We should all have been annihilated."

"We should," said Jack; "and how we are to escape eventual capture I am at a loss to think."

"We are in a desperate position, and desperate diseases require desperate remedies."

"Very true, but what are we to do?"

"The best we can, and trust to luck for the rest."

"Follow me carefully and as quickly as you can," exclaimed Claude Duval. "These steps seem to lead down to the very foundations of the mill, and there, perhaps, we may find some outlet."

CHAPTER CCCIII.

THE POSITION OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN IN THE RUINED MILL BECOMES CRITICAL.

THIS was a very faint and, most likely, fallacious hope, but still our friends grasped at it as drowning men will grasp at a straw, in the hope that it may save them from drowning.

Accordingly they followed Claude Duval down the crumbling, decaying steps, which every moment threatened to give way and precipitate them to the bottom.

But they proved strong enough to take them down, for-

after the lapse of a few minutes, they reached the bottom in safety.

They were now upon what was evidently the lowest story of the mill above ground.

And, in reality, this was not above ground, for the rubbish which we have spoken of as having accumulated round the mill, reached up considerably higher.

They were, therefore, tolerably safe until the gendarmes should positively make a breach into the building and attack them sword in hand.

Certainly they were in no danger from fire, as discharged from without.

"What's the best thing to be done now," asked Claude.

"I daresay we shall have a minute or two to deliberate."

"I don't know what had best be done," replied Tom King. "We are in an awkward fix altogether, and I can assure you I can't tell how we are going to get out of it."

"We must trust to luck, as I said before."

"It is a thousand pities we stopped that carriage."

"Well, so it is, viewing what has taken place since; but then who could have expected it?"

"No one; and, besides, it is no more than our fortune. We have been in perils before to-day, and I hope to be in many more before I die."

"Oh! don't talk of dying. It always makes me uncomfortable whenever that subject is mentioned."

"It is not a very agreeable one, I confess; but we are very near it just now, I am afraid."

"Never mind that. What had we better do?"

"That is a question."

"An important one."

"Yes, as you say, an important one."

"What are we to do, then?"

"Cannot you suggest anything, my friend?"

"No. I have been trying in vain."

"I thought so."

"We are in an awkward fix. Hark! there they go again."

A tremendous discharge from without testified that the gendarmes were keeping up the siege in good earnest.

"I tell you what it is," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"You have said a great deal about our being in an awkward fix, but if we allow ourselves to be defeated by a set of gibbering Frenchmen, I shall consider we fully deserve the worst that can happen to us."

"It's all very fine for you to say that, Jack, but how are we to get out of our difficulty? that's the thing."

"I know it is."

"As for the gibbering Frenchmen, as you call them, they are gendarmes, all picked men and capital officers."

"Pho-pho!"

"They are, and you ought to know that before to-day."

"Do you mean to say, Claude, that if they were English Bow-street runners and we in here, that they would have been as long outside this rotten mill as these fellows have?"

"Why, they would have been in like shot instead of peppering away at the woodwork in that simple fashion, upon the mere chance of hitting us."

A terrific crash followed these words, and completely drowned what was said in reply to them.

But it was soon over, and then our three friends looked in each other's faces as well as they could, in order to gather their expression.

"The mill is certainly coming down about our ears," said Tom King. "I wish we were safely out of it."

"The gendarmes have got inside at last, you may depend."

"What shall we do?"

"Why, in the first place, make it as difficult for them to get at us as you can."

"How shall we do that?"

"Demolish the steps."

"Oh! yes."

"They will then have to jump rather further than they will like in order to stand by the ace of us."

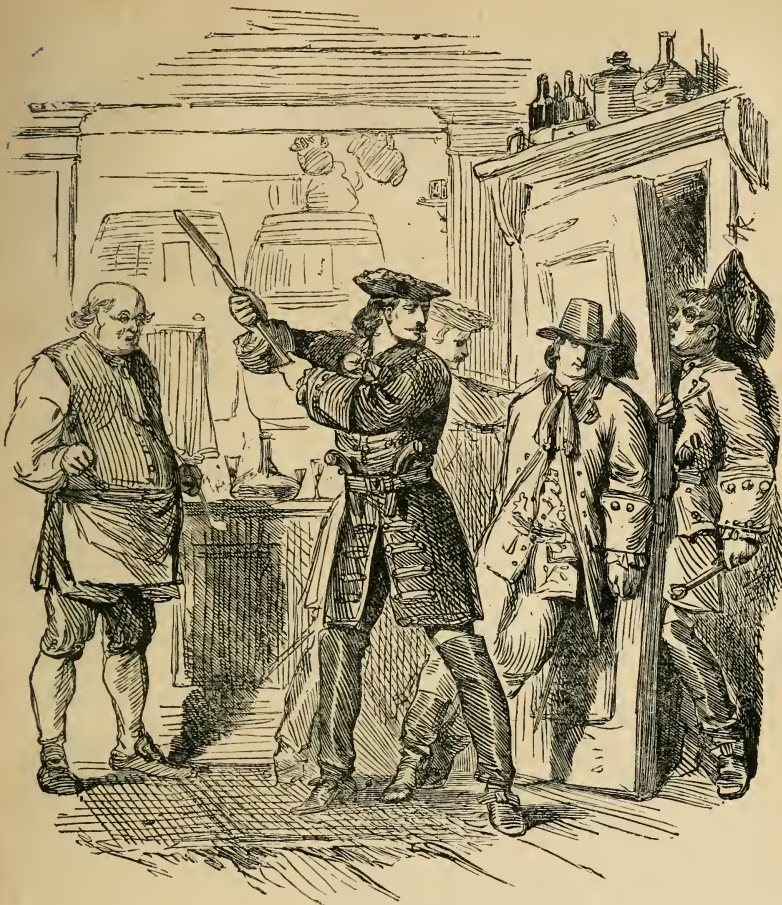
"So they will."

This hint was acted upon at once.

With their long, heavy swords our friends slashed away at the flight of steps which had enabled them to reach the spot upon which they stood.

The steps were very frail, and so their task was not enough.

By cutting away the lower part, they succeeded in pulling down the other.



[THE POLICE OFFICERS MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.]

Just as it was falling, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"I am afraid we have done a very foolish thing."

"Do you mean by cutting away the steps?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"Why, how can we get out again? We shall be starved to death here, like rats in a hole, if not worse."

"That is, supposing there is no other outlet from here," said Claude.

"Still, that ought to have been ascertained first."

"So it ought; but we must make the best of it, and set about it now."

"Hark! here come the gendarmes."

There was the hasty trampling of feet overhead, and, mingled with the sound, the voice of the officer in command.

They had clearly made a breach through some part of the side of the mill, either where their original attempt had been made, or else where an entrance was more easily effected.

The position of the highwaymen was now critical in the extreme.

Imagine, if you can, reader, a small chamber about eight feet in width, by ten in height.

The walls and ceiling composed of wooden planks roughly nailed together.

The floor also of wooden planks.

Just overhead the square aperture in the ceiling, up to which the demolished steps had led.

Such was the appearance of the place in which our friends were literally imprisoned.

Above them, coming closer to the square aperture referred to every moment, and entirely surrounding the mill, a large body of gendarmes.

These latter, however, knew not in what part of the mill to find our friends.

They had made their way into the same chamber as our friends had when they first entered it.

Should they—and beyond a doubt they would—find where their prey was hidden, nothing would be easier

than for them to stand at the square hole in the floor above and open a most murderous fire upon them.

The hasty trampling of so many feet caused the old building to shake in the most alarming manner.

But, heedless of this, the gendarmes continued their search.

And now our friends set about doing that which they ought to have done at first.

And that was to see whether there was any kind of outlet from this chamber.

To be sure, there were some steps leading down to a kind of vault which was just above the foundation of the mill, but then it was not likely they would find any outlet from thence, except the means by which they had entered it.

They, however, as a kind of forlorn hope, decided to go down and see, as they could not make their position worse by so doing.

Accordingly these steps were descended, and upon reaching the foot of them, our friends found they were standing in a kind of vaulted chamber of very limited dimensions.

Claude had the lantern, and directly he found himself standing upon firm ground, he flashed the light of it about him.

But there was little to see.

The walls and floor were composed of a kind of clayey earth, beaten hard and flat.

Several huge beams, doubtless used for the support of the structure above, crossed the place in various directions.

But, beyond this, there was nothing to see.

A closer inspection was, however, made, in order to ascertain whether there was any means of exit.

Owing to the limited dimensions of the place, a search did not occupy many minutes.

On one side, half-hidden by one of the huge wooden beams, was a door.

It opened to a touch, and our friends, without hesitation, passed through the portal, Claude carrying the light and leading the way.

The atmosphere in this inner vault was very impure and damp; so much so, indeed, that our friends found considerable difficulty in breathing, while the lustre of the lamp perceptibly diminished.

But this was principally owing to the door having been closed.

The foul, pent-up air rapidly rushed out, while fresh poured in in its place.

But this circumstance did not look well for finding an outlet.

Glancing round, our friends saw they were in a kind of cellar or vault.

For what purpose it had been designed was more than they could tell, nor did they stop to inquire.

It was quite sufficient for them that such a place was there.

The sounds, which from time to time came to their ears, showed them that the gendarmes were rapidly approaching.

They had no time to lose.

They had been forced to burrow in the earth like foxes, and there was every probability of their being speedily unearthed.

Considerable tact had been displayed by the gendarmes in their attack upon the mill.

If they were slow in what they were about, they were sure.

Upon forcing an entrance, and standing fairly within the building, they looked all round them, but no trace of those they sought could they see.

The officer in command then gave his instructions in the following fashion.

Half the gendarmes remained outside.

They formed themselves into a ring round the mill, standing within a few feet of each other.

Every man held his musket in his hand, ready for immediate service in case either of the fugitives should make their appearance.

In the event of their doing so, they were not to wait for further instructions, but to fire at them, and, if possible, they were to wound and disable them without taking their

entered the building, were, by his orders, sent to the very top of the mill.

Then, having satisfied themselves that they could not possibly go any higher, they set about the task of searching narrowly all around them.

As soon as they felt quite certain there was no one there, they went down to the next floor, repeating just the same mode of operation as before.

And so they went steadily down thus, thinking to make quite sure of their prey by driving them to the earth.

There was only one thing to be said in disfavour of this plan.

It took time.

Rather too much time to be altogether safe.

In such cases speedy measures are the best.

However, the gendarmes got down to the lower floor of the mill, and having searched that, and met with no better success than had hitherto attended their efforts, they proceeded to go still lower, when they discovered that the communicating steps had been cut away.

Fearlessly enough, however, several of them, finding there was no one in the chamber below, lowered themselves into it, and dropped down.

They then renewed their search.

How they were to escape not one of the highwaymen had any idea.

They could tell the gendarmes were very close at hand, and yet they seemed as far off attaining their object as ever.

They ran hastily round the vaulted chamber, into which they had made their way, and discovered a small opening on a level with the floor, looking like the entrance to some cavernous place.

Indeed, from the first, Claude Duval had been inclined to think that caverns must exist somewhere in the huge hill upon the crest of which the mill had been built, and it was this which encouraged him to continue these explorations underground.

The supposition was not an unlikely one, and it would turn out a very lucky thing for our friends if good grounds were found for it.

Certainly the rude little arched passage which Claude found seemed to lend colour to the idea.

The gendarmes were too close behind to allow them any time to deliberate whether they should seek safety by crawling through this arch, so Claude Duval set the example at once, leaving his comrades to follow him.

The archway, as he had expected, formed the entrance to a passage which in shape more resembled the entrance to a vault than ought else.

Still it was high enough to allow Claude to walk through it in an upright posture.

The length of this passage was only a few feet, and they emerged from it into a large cavern.

The most noticeable thing in this was a most tremendous rushing of water, as of a cascade, though at a considerable distance from where they stood.

The place was as dark as it is possible for any place to be, even were it in the very inmost recesses of the earth.

"Now, Claude, what are we to do?" asked Tom King, as soon as they emerged from the passage.

"Have you anything to suggest, Tom?"

"No, without we were all to make a stand at this narrow entrance, and defend ourselves from any one who attempted to pass through it."

"Our numbers are too unequal for us to do any good at that; besides, they would collect together and rush forward in a body with sufficient impetuosity to break through any guard which we might oppose to them."

"I am afraid so."

"What then is to be done?"

"We must continue to retreat. We have certainly been very lucky in getting so far as we have. It is more than either of you expected."

"It is."

"Come on, then, as quickly as you can, or else our foes will come up with us, and we shall be quite done for. This cavern seems to me, so far as I can tell, of vast extent, and somewhere in the distance I can hear the dashing of a waterfall."

"And you think that shows some prospect of our finding an outlet?" said Tom King.

BYRON.

The remainder, along with the chief officer, having

CHAPTER CCCIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND HIS TWO COMRADES ESCAPE FROM THE GENDARMES BY THE ADOPTION OF A PERILOUS CHANCE.

"I HOPE so, at any rate," replied Claude.

"There are many more unlikely things."

"I wish we could stop up the passage, and so put a stop to pursuit, for some time at least."

"It would be a good thing."

"Shall we do it?"

"I think we had better not. We have no time, and we have no tools or materials suited to the purpose."

"That is very true."

"Our best plan is to keep as great a distance between our foes and ourselves as we possibly can. This cavern seems to stretch out a long way, let us make our way in as direct a line across it as we possibly can."

There was sound sense in this proposal, and so his comrades resolved to accede to it.

To take a path in a direct line across the cavern was a more difficult matter than one would be apt to think at a first glance.

The place was so dark that none but those who have been in a similar place could form any idea of what it was like.

The only means they had of dispersing this darkness was the lantern which Claude Duval carried in his hand, and, as may readily be supposed, this was quite inadequate for the purpose.

They could not, indeed, see more than a yard before them—the light was more like that emitted from a star than anything else.

Claude held it in such a manner that the principal rays which passed through the lens fell upon the ground close before his feet.

By taking this precaution he avoided coming in contact with any article.

As they advanced, which they did in true Indian file, the sound of rushing water continued to come more and more plainly to their ears.

In a little while afterwards the beam of light which the lantern sent forth shone upon water.

A halt was made, and then our friends found themselves upon the banks of a stream.

Claude Duval flashed the lantern about him in order to take in, if possible, the general aspect of the place.

To his surprise he found the cavern had grown much narrower—indeed, he seemed to be in one corner of it.

The black walls were visible all around him.

Straight in front was a narrow stream, the water in which was rushing along with the greatest impetuosity.

The channel in which it flowed seemed to be solid rock, worn away by constant attrition.

Seeing this, our friends ran along the bank for some distance, until they came to the place where the water fell down.

This was at one end of the cavern.

From some height which they could not see, even when the light of the lantern was directed upwards, the water came pouring down with great force, forming, indeed, quite a cascade.

It was this which made the rushing, roaring noise they had at first heard.

Now that they stood so near, the ground seemed to fairly tremble beneath their feet, so heavily did the water fall down into the kind of basin which it had hollowed for itself out of the rock.

In their surprise at seeing so strange a spectacle as a waterfall in a pitch dark cavern, our friends for a moment forgot the peril of their position.

But they were quickly reminded of the imminency of the danger which impended over them by the appearance of their enemies the gendarmes.

These had been able, with some little trouble, to track the fugitives to the cavern, and then they set about procuring lights to assist them in searching it.

This was easily enough done, as the materials were all ready to their fingers.

One of the gendarmes, by means of a flint and steel, struck a light.

Then the others with their swords chopped off large pieces of the many beams of wood that were in the mill, and readily hewed them into a torch-like shape.

They then ignited them, and the wood, being exceedingly dry and of a resinous quality, burned up brightly and answered the purpose of giving a light as well as the best torches could have done.

Every gendarme was thus provided, and, as they were in rather large numbers, the light which they cast around them was almost enough to illuminate the whole of the cavern, which was not so vast as the highwaymen at first imagined it to be.

It was in this way the gendarmes made their way through the passage into the cavern.

They held their extemporized torches as high up in the air as they could, so that their light should be diffused as much as possible.

But, of course, they did not see our friends as quickly as our friends saw them.

Claude immediately masked his lantern, and spoke in a whisper to his comrades.

"We must be quick," he said, "and endeavour to find our way out of this place."

"We must, but how?"

"As the gendarmes carry so many lights it will be easy for us to avoid coming into contact with the gendarmes."

"Certainly; but which way must we take that will give us the most likely chance of escape?"

"We cannot go any further this way?"

"No."

"Then let us follow the course of the stream. You see, it flows in a straight direction as far as we are able to see."

"But where will it take us to?"

"That I know not, but a stream of water like that must flow out somewhere, so I think we had better keep along its banks until we find out where it really does go."

"That is a good idea, Claude, and excellent advice."

"I am glad you think so."

"Lead on, then, quickly; we will follow behind you in Indian file."

"Come on, then."

"Go as quickly as you can, Claude."

"I will."

"Look how the gendarmes are dispersing themselves about the cavern. It is a thousand to one now if we are not intercepted before we go a dozen yards further."

Claude glanced round, and saw what his companion said was perfectly correct.

The gendarmes were rapidly dispersing themselves over the area of the cavern, and searching about with a vigour which bid fair in a little while to unearth our friends.

A faint reflected light came from the distant torches—so faint, indeed, that the foaming, rapidly-flowing water was but just discernible to Claude.

But it enabled him to make his way along the bank of the stream without wandering from his proper course.

The thundering din of the waterfall effectually drowned the slight sound which the footsteps of the fugitives raised.

On they went with tolerable rapidity, but the gendarmes were quicker in their movements, and ran hither and thither with bewildering quickness.

They were, doubtless, making a thorough search of the cavern, and eventually the highwaymen must have been discovered if they remained in it.

Suddenly, however, Claude came to an abrupt standstill.

His friends quickly learned the cause of it.

He had reached the wall of the cavern, through which the water flowed, and he could get no further.

Dimly—very dimly—they could see the outlines of a low and irregularly-shaped arch.

Underneath this the water flowed.

But to where?

That was a mystery.

It might be that it took its course deep down into the very bowels of the earth, where it went to supply some huge subterranean lake from which there was no outlet.

Under the arch all was darkness.

Not a single ray of light came to inspire the hope that in that direction they might be able to make their escape.

Claude's idea was that, by following this stream, he should be enabled to gain some other cavern and finally reach the open air.

He did not anticipate that the passage would construct itself into an arch.

The stream narrowed considerably, and the water rushed under the archway with tremendous speed, foam- ing and hissing as it went.

What were our friends to do?

Looking round, they found to their dismay that they had got into a portion of the cavern which was elongated in shape.

Indeed, the whole was very irregular in its figuration, and contained numerous indentations and projections.

It was into one of these indentations that our friends had got, and they saw with the utmost uneasiness the contracted space in which they stood.

But it was too late for them to emerge from it.

The gendarmes had already searched the whole area of the place, and were coming directly to them.

A good idea can be had of the kind of place in which the highwaymen were by saying that the recess in which they stood was like a funnel in shape, the funnel being laid upon its side.

The entrance to this recess was very large, and gradually tapered off until the water flowed through a space about equal in proportion to the hole at the bottom of a funnel.

The gendarmes were advancing rapidly.

To have attempted to pass them would have been impossible.

The space too limited for them to hope to do so undetected.

Then how were they to act?

The question was more than either could answer.

If they stood there, although they might maintain a resistance for a time, yet eventually they would be overpowered by numbers.

They could not fly.

If they attempted they would be captured or slain.

If they stayed where they were they would meet with precisely the same fate.

There was but one alternative open to them, and that was of so horrible a nature that it is not surprising if, bold as they were, they shrank from the adoption of it.

There was no time for hesitation.

If they did not make up their minds at once they would be deprived of even that one desperate chance.

Yet they did hesitate, and shrank from embracing it. At the worst, however, they could but meet with death. That would be their fate if they remained.

But the other did offer them a chance of life.

The reader will perhaps guess what the alternative alluded to is.

We think so, because it suggested itself spontaneously to the three friends, and though not a word was said, yet each came to the same conclusion respecting it.

It was this.

To commit themselves to the current of the stream, and allow it to drift them beneath the arch.

But though that promised a chance of safety, yet there were such contingencies attached to it that made them hold back.

To what place that stream might flow they could form no accurate idea.

It might be that if they once passed beneath that arch they would never again emerge into the light of day.

It might be that the arch grew narrower and narrower, until the bulk of water filled it quite up, and the passage became converted into a pipe.

Or it might be that the cause of the water had a downward tendency, and that the rapidity of its motion would increase to such a degree that they could not prevent themselves from being dashed to pieces against its jagged banks.

Or it might lead to the inmost recesses of the earth, from which it would be impossible for them to get away.

Or if these dangers were passed through, how could they tell what horrible creatures inhabited those waters, and whose instinct caused them to prey upon human life?

Then how horrible it would be, in that dark place, to suddenly find themselves in the cold grasp of some slimy monster.

The brain turns sick at the contemplation of such horrors.

But our friends did not wish to be captured.

In a strange country they knew they would meet with

a short shift, and they were not many seconds reasoning themselves into the belief that, as they had to die, it would not matter how.

Tom King touched his two friends.

"There is no help for it, we must adopt this last resource. For my own part, I have determined to dare and do anything rather than be captured. Follow me, my friends. Quick—quick! or it will be too late."

Tom King's words had an immediate effect upon his comrades.

They had already made up their minds to do as he had determined upon doing.

No sooner had he spoke than Tom King leaped into the stream.

His companions followed his example.

They were either seen or heard by the gendarmes, for they could not avoid making a slight splash.

A loud cry assailed their ears, however, and the men rushed forward, casting the light of their torches upon the water.

The current was very strong, but the stream was not very deep, so the highwaymen were able to keep their footing.

Tom King was the first to pass beneath the arch.

He had to assume a stooping posture to do so.

The current seemed stronger beneath it, perhaps owing to a still further constriction of the channel.

But by stretching out his arms, he was able to touch the walls on either side of him.

This was of great assistance, for by pressing against them, or occasionally grasping at those pieces of rock which projected from them, he was able to preserve himself from being carried away by the tide.

In the most intense darkness he groped his way onwards, more than once striking his head against the roof, the height of which was very irregular, and from which, in some places, pieces descended like stalactites.

He found that, to avoid serious injury from them, he should have to stoop still more, and so he proceeded with his back bent and his lips almost touching the water.

His two comrades followed close after him; Sixteen-String Jack coming next, and Claude Duval bringing up the rear.

But as soon as they were out of sight beneath the arch, the dragoons arrived at the spot upon which they had so recently stood, and the light from their torches showed them plenty of indications which pointed to the direction the fugitives had taken.

CHAPTER CCCV.

THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE GENDARMES ENTERS THE PASSAGE AND MEETS WITH A HORRIBLE ADVENTURE.

A LOUD guttural kind of yell, which came plainly to the ears of the three highwaymen, arose from the gendarmes when they discovered the route the fugitives had taken.

But though, beyond all doubt, there were amongst them several brave men, yet not one could be found who did not shrink from the thoughts of entering that narrow gloomy passage, though they had the powerful influence of example before them.

It seemed too much like walking into the tomb.

The officer in command looked for a moment all the surprise he felt at the daring of the three Englishmen, who had already given himself and his troops so much trouble.

But a feeling of rage and anger soon supervened, and he determined by a summary process to put an end to the whole business at once.

Least of all did he like the idea of entering the narrow sewer-like passage.

But, notwithstanding his disinclination to follow them further, he was resolved they should not escape.

Accordingly, he spoke to his men, and commanded them to stand together in a throng, facing as nearly as possible the little archway.

Then rapidly followed the words:

"Make ready!"

The rattling of muskets followed.

"Present!"

The words were uttered in a loud tone, and came plainly enough to the ears of the three highwaymen, who felt uncomfortable according.

But all they did was to press forward with still greater

rapidity along the narrow passage in which they found themselves.

Before giving the final order, the officer in command of the gendarmes addressed himself as follows to the three fugitives.

"Surrender! Surrender yourselves at once, and your lives will be spared. I will give you one minute to consider of my offer. Surrender, I say, and save your lives. Otherwise, if you refuse, I shall give the word to my brave followers, and they will fire up this narrow passage. If they do your lives must be lost, for how can you escape a dozen bullets when you are in a place no larger than will just admit your bodies? Surrender, I say, and your lives will be spared."

The officer paused.

Doubtless he fully anticipated that our friends would not hesitate a moment, but yield themselves up to him without further trouble.

But let us see how the highwaymen received his announcement.

The reader will guess that, desperate as was their emergency, they did not intend to give in so ignominiously as to crawl out of the tunnel, and be taken one by one as they did so.

Such a proceeding was not at all in accordance with their ideas.

Claude Duval who was last, and who consequently stood the worst chance, when the gendarmes fired did not flinch, but simply cried to his comrades in advance—

"Make haste—make haste! Be as quick as ever you can, or those confounded Frenchmen will put an end to us."

"All right, my friend," responded Tom King; "press on as quickly as you can; you need not fear overtaking us."

The time having elapsed which the officer had specified without his receiving any reply, he spoke again.

He evidently wished to take them prisoners and not to slay them.

"You make no reply," he cried, getting as close to the entrance of the passage as he could; "I shall call upon you once—I shall call upon you twice—I shall call upon you three times; and then, if you do not respond, I shall give the word to fire."

No notice was taken of this speech; and so, grown somewhat furious, the officer cried—

"Surrender, once."

No reply.

"Surrender, twice."

Still silence.

"Surrender, three times."

Then, as no reply followed this last appeal, he cried to his men—

"Fire!"

The gendarmes had stood with their fingers on the triggers of their muskets.

The muzzles of every one of them were pointed to the little arch.

They had also assumed such positions as would cause the shots to carry the greatest possible distance.

As soon, then, as their commander gave the word, they simultaneously pulled their triggers, and a terrific report and a blinding sheet of flame followed.

For an infinitesimal small space of time the interior of the cavern was lighted up with it.

Then succeeded what looked like a double darkness.

The bullets from the muskets went crashing against the rocks.

But no sound came to the listening ears of the gendarmes to show that their murderous volley had met with the success they intended it should.

As quickly then as possible, the officer commanded them to reload and fire again.

He was obeyed with true military promptitude.

Again was the cavern illuminated.

Again did the ear-deafening report of the weapons raise a thousand echoes amongst its recesses.

Again did the bullets come in crashing contact with the jutting rocks.

But with the same result as before.

If there was anything more calculated than another to fill the officer of gendarmes with vexation it was this.

If he had heard a yell of anguish—a groan—or a cry for mercy, he would have felt more satisfied.

But silence was most perplexing and annoying.

He did not know what to make of it.

Had they been annihilated by the first discharge?

That seemed scarcely probable.

Had they, by means of that dismal looking passage, emerged into another cavern similar to that which they had left?

That was possible, but still he was not sufficiently assured of it to follow them.

Or had they already come by their death?

Did the floor of the passage abruptly change its level, and had they been carried over the verge of the abyss, and plunged perhaps fathoms down in the bosom of the earth?

It might be, or numerous other casualties might have befallen them, any of which would produce instantaneous death.

The officer soon made these reflections, and he came to the determination, in his own mind, that he would not fire again.

He paused a moment to consider what had best be done, and consult, in a low tone, with a few of his subordinates.

The result of the conversation was this.

The men were called upon to volunteer who would run the risk of entering the passage.

All were silent until the chief officer announced his intention of leading the way, and then the gendarmes, ashamed of the pusillanimity which they had displayed, pressed forward in a body.

The chief did not shrink, but took a torch from the hands of one of his followers.

Then, with his drawn sword in his other hand, he stepped into the stream, and walked boldly up to the little arch.

Having their leader before them, and with his example exerting its influence upon them, the gendarmes could not for shame hold back, so they all crowded closely at his heels.

The passage was entered.

In the same manner as the highwaymen had done, the gendarmes made their way along it.

The chief, however, went at a more steady pace than they did, and waved his torch about him in the expectation of coming upon some signs of the death of those of whom he was in search.

But nothing of the kind met his gaze.

The velocity of the current increased, and more than once he all but lost his foothold, so he was forced at length to consign his sword to its sheath and proceed unarmed, using his right arm as a means to cling to the rock, by which alone he could hope to retain his footing in the treacherous current.

A kind of mist, caused doubtless by the rapid flow of the water, rose in the air, mingled with fine spray, which threatened every moment to extinguish the torches.

However, they did just keep alight, burning in a dim, sickly fashion, and yet serving to illuminate the recesses of the passage.

They were able to avoid those projections of which we have spoken as being such serious impediments to our friends.

Suddenly, however, the chief of the gendarmes came to a halt.

He was about twenty yards within the passage—that is to say, he was about that distance from the arch by which he had entered.

His followers stopped also, and those who were nearest to him peeped over his shoulder, in order to ascertain what was the cause of the abrupt stoppage.

Those who did so were immediately satisfied.

In their path—a few feet only in advance—and seeming to block up the passage entirely, was some strange, shiny, half-defined object.

What it was none could tell, but in the centre of this dark mass, and separated from each other by a space of not more than two inches, were a couple of bright luminous objects.

A glance was sufficient to show what they were.

They were eyes.

There could be no doubt about that.

They were bright, fierce-looking eyes, too, and such as were calculated to make any one shrink back in half-defined terror.

To what kind of animal they belonged they could not tell.

But certainly to no human being.

A strange puffing, snorting noise came to the ears of the gendarmes, and it evidently proceeded from the creature which blocked up the passage.

Had it been in some fair open spot, and in the broad daylight, it is possible that the gendarmes would have looked upon this animal with very different feelings to what they did.

But in that intensely dark, cavernous passage, standing up to their knees almost in cold water, and in such a confined place, where they had no means of seeing what it was, or forming some idea of the power of mischief which it possessed, they felt nervous and terrified, when perhaps there was very little foundation for it.

Involuntarily they drew back a step, and the chief did so likewise.

He by no means relished the position which he occupied, and the thought of an encounter with the strange inhabitant of that dark place made him feel anything but comfortable.

The puffing, roaring noise increased in loudness.

It was a sound expressive of anger.

The creature was irritated.

The eyes seemed to glare more fiercely.

In vain the chief of the gendarmes raised his torch and strove to send some of its rays upon the object before him, in order to come to some kind of conclusion as to what it was like.

All he could see was something black, like the rocks which formed the walls and roof of the passage, and where its outlines ended and the others began he could not for the life of him discern.

He was prudent enough not to make any aggressive movement; if he had done so, he might have placed himself in a situation of much danger.

And now another fact pressed itself rather unpleasantly upon his notice.

The eyes seemed to be growing larger and larger.

Their brightness increased also.

At first he was unable to account for this, but soon the conviction forced itself upon him.

The animal—if such it were—was coming nearer.

It was doing what they were afraid to do.

Advancing to the attack.

If he any doubts upon this point, they were removed by the splashing of the water, which he heard plainly enough as the creature forced its way through the stream.

The chief of the gendarmes drew back.

It only needed that movement to lead wings to the feet of his companions.

Thoroughly dismayed and terrified, not only at their strange position, but also at the unknown creature before them, they were glad to seize upon any pretext for a retreat.

The movement which the chief gave communicated itself to the whole of the troop, and they turned and fled along the passage in the direction of the cavern which they had just left.

Many a time they stumbled in their slippery path and fell into the water, or knocked their heads terrible blows against the pieces of rock which depended from the ceiling.

But, heedless of all the injuries which they received—intent only upon getting out as soon as possible, which made them insensible to all else—they still continued their course.

Those who fell scrambled in some incomprehensible manner to their feet again, and those whose heads came into contact with the rocks most marvellously escaped unconsciousness, though many of the blows received were quite sufficient, under ordinary circumstances, to produce it.

Having penetrated so short a distance as they had, of course it was not long before they all emerged into the cavern.

No one can conceive what a sigh of relief they gave when they found themselves there in safety, nor could any one believe what a comfortable place they thought it after the vague horrors which beset them in the passage.

As soon as the chief of the gendarmes emerged into the cavern, in justice to him let it be said he regained his self-possession.

The panic which he had been a victim to left him.

He was once more a cool, intrepid officer.

He ordered his men to prepare their muskets and stand in readiness to fire.

He was obeyed, for soldiers will obey mechanically under almost all circumstances, so thoroughly is the principle of implicit obedience drilled into them.

The soldiers stood in readiness.

The position they occupied was the same as before when they fired a volley into the passage.

The chief then cautiously approached the little arch, and listened.

He could still hear the same puffing, snorting noise, although the roar of the waterfall almost made it inaudible.

He caught one glimpse of the gleaming eyes.

The creature had then followed them along the passage, undaunted by their numbers.

He was full of wonder to know what it could be.

But, great as his wonder was, it did not make him forgetful of the fact that now they had the creature at a manifest advantage.

He had no idea what its aggressive powers might be if it once emerged into the cavern, nor how difficult and dangerous it might be to achieve a victory over it.

CHAPTER CCCVI.

OUR THREE FRIENDS HAVE SOME FURTHER PERILOUS ADVENTURES IN THE CAVERNS.

BUT wedged in the passage as the creature appeared to be, the advantage was greatly upon his own side, and the chances of obtaining an easy victory over it almost certain.

Like a skilful general, then, who never allows such a favourable opportunity to slip, he gave the order to his men to prepare to fire.

The muskets were carried to the shoulders of the gendarmes, and their muzzles pointed to the entrance of the passage, close to the mouth of which the strange creature must be.

The men had their fingers upon the triggers, awaiting the word to fire.

But this the chief did not give.

He was watching the little dark arch, and had determined to give the word of command only when he caught sight of those horrible gleaming eyes, which had caused such a sickly feeling of terror to gather about his heart.

He had not long to wait.

Courageously the creature came on, never dreaming for a moment of the danger in which it stood.

The officer saw the eyes.

The gendarmes saw them too, for their gaze was intently fixed upon that same spot.

"Fire!"

The word rung out with extreme distinctness in that vast cavern.

It was obeyed with greater promptitude than any order was ever obeyed before.

Scarcely was the word pronounced than there was the simultaneous discharge of the muskets which the gendarmes held.

Once more was the interior of the cavern transiently illuminated by a bright flash almost blinding in its brilliancy.

Once more were the echoes of the place raised by the thundering discharge.

But scarcely one bullet struck against the rock, so accurate was the aim which every man had taken.

Mingled with the reports of the muskets there arose a strange yelling cry, the like of which not one of those who heard it ever listened to before.

It was, however, clearly a cry indicative of great bodily pain.

Then all was still.

Not one of the gendarmes moved hand or foot.

With an effort the chief officer shook off the effect which these strange adventures had upon him.

His words aroused the men.

By his orders the torches were trimmed, and fresh ones obtained and lighted.

Then, with feelings which we could not describe—feelings brought about by the strange nature of the place in which they stood—the gendarmes in a body pressed

forward to see what kind of creature it was that they had slain.

Slain? They were by no means certain upon that point.

They knew well enough that many wild animals when badly hurt would feign death, and that so cunningly as to deceive any one until, upon a near approach of its adversaries, it would gather all its remaining strength, and in an expiring effort inflict great injury upon them.

And this reflection caused the gendarmes to approach the arch with great caution, lest one of them should be badly hurt by their strange antagonist.

But there was one thing which they entirely overlooked or forgot.

And that was the strength of the current and the impetuosity with which it flowed beneath the arch.

The animal, as we have seen, had been able to overcome the resistance which the rapidly-flowing water offered, and make its way to the arch.

But when the gendarmes fired that terrible volley, the contents of so many muskets being concentrated upon so small a spot, it had the immediate effect of depriving the animal of that strength which had hitherto enabled it to make a stand against the current, and it was with great swiftness drifted along the passage.

By the time, then, the gendarmes, in their cautiousness, had reached the arch, the body of the creature was far away.

Their disappointment was very great when, upon looking and expecting to see their adversary, they found the arch quite clear and just as it was when they first entered it.

They were at no loss to account for this, and they felt angry with themselves that the thought had not occurred to them.

They held a torch as far underneath as they could, but nothing but the foaming water met their gaze.

There was nothing to be seen.

Nor was there any means of ascertaining the nature of the creature which they had the encounter with, except by once more entering the gloomy passage.

But all naturally enough shrunk from doing this.

They withdrew, and the chief officer once more held a brief consultation as to what would be the best thing for them to do.

Not one of his arguments, however, could induce the gendarmes to enter the passage which was inhabited by such dreadful and mysterious creatures.

They were willing to fight against men, they said, to the last gasp, but they could not fight animals which they could not see, and of whose powers of mischief they were entirely ignorant.

The chief officer himself, if the truth must be told, felt no individual inclination to enter the passage again.

He had already had enough of that sort of thing.

Eventually he determined to leave six of his men as a kind of guard in the cavern.

They were to station themselves close to the arch, with their muskets ready for immediate service, and to shoot the first living thing that made its appearance.

Then he himself, with the remainder of his men, left the cavern, with the intention of finding whereabouts the stream emerged.

Men were left, however, at short intervals, and this was continued until the exterior of the mill was reached, so that a ready and easy means of communication was established between those above and those below.

The result of what had taken place was communicated to those gendarmes who had been on duty surrounding the mill.

These, of course, had seen and heard nothing of those whose capture they were so anxious to effect.

A slight change was also made.

Those men who had been in the caverns were left to surround the mill, and those who had previously been occupied in the performance of that duty accompanied the chief officer in his search for the spot where the stream of water, flowing through the passage, found its way out into the earth.

The hill upon which the mill was built was one of a chain of hills which extended for some considerable distance right and left of where he stood.

These hills were both high and large enough to contain many caverns underneath them, and doubtless there were many.

The officer had certain knowledge that there was at least one.

But we will leave him to prosecute his search, while we more particularly turn our attention to describing the adventures and proceedings of the three highwaymen themselves.

It will be recollected that the last time we saw them was upon a very critical occasion, namely, when the gendarmes were about to fire into the narrow passage.

When the chief officer made the speech in which he called upon them to surrender, our friends heard every word he said with the greatest distinctness.

But they never for a moment dreamed of yielding themselves prisoners in the kind manner proposed.

They pressed forward with increased speed, and immediately afterwards Tom King uttered a faint cry of satisfaction.

His comrades heard it distinctly enough, but they did not have any occasion to ask what was the cause of it.

It was very simple.

Tom King had reached a certain point in the passage where it turned off to the right, at an acute angle from the direction it had previously taken, which was undeviatingly straight.

It was incident upon making this discovery that Tom King uttered that ejaculatory cry of satisfaction, and he was round the corner in a moment.

He was followed, with extreme quickness, by his two comrades—for they knew the imminency of the danger in which they stood.

Just, however, as Claude Duval turned round, the order to fire was given, and the next instant many of the bullets passed over the spot upon which they had so recently stood, and flattened themselves against the wall, formed by the sudden curve in the passage.

Our friends were much delighted, too, to find that the passage increased in size as they proceeded, and that very rapidly.

So they did not wait to see what else the gendarmes did after the discharge of their volley, but hastened along the passage in the hope that ere long they should emerge into the open air.

At every step they took the passage grew wider and higher, and, of course, one effect of this was that the velocity of the current was much diminished, and they were consequently able to walk in the bed of the stream with much more convenience than before.

But their hopes of being conducted to the open air were doomed to disappointment.

The termination of the passage through the rocks was reached, and then they found that it was no more than an unpleasant means of communication between the cavern they had left and another of very similar general appearance.

Claude Duval now ventured to unmask his lantern, the light from which he had hitherto carefully concealed, and handed it to Tom King, who at once led the way out of the stream on to the dry floor of the second cavern.

His two comrades quickly stood by his side, but, before they had time to exchange a word with each other, they were startled with a strange sound.

It was like that which would be produced by some unwieldy animal when out of breath.

They instantly drew their swords and put themselves in an attitude of defence, for they did not know with what danger they might be threatened.

Tom King, too, waved the lantern about him as to diffuse its light.

Their eyes then fell upon a singular object.

On a projecting piece of rock, which was only about a foot above the surface, was one of the most singular-looking creatures they had ever beheld.

In length it was about seven feet—in width, at the thickest part, about four.

It had a small head in proportion to the rest of the body.

But the head had a very intelligent look, as small heads frequently have.

The shape of it, and the face also, was quite unlike anything our friends had before seen in the whole course of their experience.

But one of the most remarkable features connected with this creature, whatever it might be, were its eyes.

They were large, round and full and intensely bright.

They seemed even to possess some degree of luminosity of their own, so brightly did they appear to gleam.

They shone in the darkness like two bright orbs of light.

This small head was joined to a neck which was round and sleek.

This neck was supported by two massive shoulders. These, indeed, seemed the most massive part of the animal, for it was just there where its width and height was the greatest.

It was furnished with two feet or fins, our friends could not tell which. Doubtless they were intended to serve the purposes of both, and were shaped accordingly.

From the thick unwieldy shoulders the body of this strange specimen of the animal creation tapered off until it terminated in a tail, in all respects like the tail of a middling-sized fish.

The colour of the whole body was either black or something approaching it, and shone like highly-polished marble.

For some few moments the three highwaymen stood looking at this strange creature with the utmost surprise, interest, and curiosity.

They found that the snorting noise they had heard, and which had first attracted their attention, was caused by the animal breathing, which it seemed to do with great labour and difficulty.

"What do you think of that?" asked Claude.

"I have no idea," replied Tom King, to whom he addressed his remark. "Do you think it meditates making an attack upon us?"

"It looks very fierce," said Sixteen-String Jack, drawing back a step. "I wonder whether it can move quickly."

"I do not know. I never saw the like of such a creature before. What a lucky thing we did not meet it in the passage."

"In the passage?" exclaimed Tom King. "Stop! I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"An idea for ridding us of our foes—for a time at least."

"How?"

"Why let us drive this strange-looking creature into the passage."

"What for?"

"I should not wonder if the gendarmes, who must by this time be thoroughly enraged, do not attempt to follow us through the passage."

"Oh! I see now what you mean, Tom. You think if you can drive this creature into the passage, it will so terrify the gendarmes that they will turn back."

"That is just it."

"Then it is a capital idea, and I wish you success. And another thing: if we can drive it before us as we wish, who knows?—we might work it up to such a pitch of fury that it would actually attack the gendarmes, and force them to retreat."

"It is a capital notion," cried Claude Duval. "Let us set about it at once, for we have no time to lose. For all we know, the gendarmes may at this very moment be halfway through the passage."

"Most likely."

"The chief difficulty will be to get the creature into the passage. It may refuse to stir."

"Do not anticipate that. We can but try."

"Come on, then. You had better draw your swords."

The three highwaymen, with their drawn swords in their hands, now cautiously approached the shelving piece of rock upon which the strange animal lay.

It evidently viewed their coming with dissatisfaction, and a sort of growling sound mingled with the puffing, snorting noise of which we have before spoken.

It did not offer to move, however, even when its assailants were within a few feet of it.

Our friends were certainly running a great risk in thus provoking a conflict with an animal of whose powers of destruction they were completely ignorant.

But so much would be gained if they could carry out their original intention that they felt they could afford to run a good deal of risk.

Tom King held the light so that the beams fell full upon the face of the creature.

It blinked its eyes, but did not offer to stir.

Then Sixteen-String Jack waved his sword, but the animal took no notice of that hostile demonstration.

There was nothing more to do now than to proceed to harsher measures, so Jack with the point of his sword just pricked him gently where he fancied the skin would be thinnest and most sensitive.

CHAPTER CCCVII.

THE CREATURE OF THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN BECOMES STILL MORE CRITICAL.

THE growling sound to which the strange amphibious creature had given utterance increased in loudness.

It showed its teeth, too, and a vicious kind of look came over its whole face.

But Claude Duval seconded the attack which his comrades made, and then, with a cry of pain, the animal sprang off the piece of rock into the stream.

The victory was so far gained, and the highwaymen of course followed up their advantage.

The creature was a great weight, and it fell into the water with a tremendous splash.

With the points of their swords the highwaymen continued to prick the skin of it, and it naturally shrunk every time a puncture was inflicted.

In this way, then, they succeeded in driving it in the direction they wished it to take.

When it once fairly got into the passage, their task was very much easier.

They pricked it more vigorously, so as to enrage it as much as possible.

At full speed, then, it made its way along the passage towards the first cavern.

Soon such sounds came to the ears of our friends as incontestably proved that the gendarmes had entered the passage, and were in full pursuit of them.

Upon making this discovery, they deemed it prudent to go no further, so Claude Duval gave the poor creature one vigorous parting thrust—such a one as would, he imagined, carry it the remainder of the distance.

Maddened, and thoroughly infuriated with the pain which it suffered, the creature continued its way along the passage until it confronted the gendarmes.

Then it came to a stand.

But only for a moment.

Blinded by fury it made a rush forward.

The gendarmes retreated.

The rest we know.

When that volley was fired, the creature was just beneath the arch.

Indeed, a portion of its body was already within the cavern.

Nearly all the bullets that were fired lodged in its body.

The cry, then, that the gendarmes heard was the last one it uttered.

It fell down dead, and the current carried it far away in a moment.

But our friends did not know this.

Their troubles, nevertheless, were far from being over.

They retraced their steps to the second cavern without meeting with any accident.

Their unanimous decision was to get out into the open air as soon as possible.

Accordingly, they made a rapid examination of the cavern, the result of which was that they found it very similar to the other.

At one end was the passage by which they had entered.

The stream of water flowed in a serpentine manner across it, and passed out again under another arch.

Than this there was no other exit that our friends could find.

After some hesitation they determined to try their luck. The former one having been passed in safety gave them courage to make a second attempt.

In the hope, then, that this stream might conduct them out of these gloomy regions, the three highwaymen again stepped into the bed of the stream and passed underneath the arch.

But it was not without great misgiving lest they should be so unfortunate as to meet with some other inhabitant of it, with whom they by no means desired to have an encounter.

This second passage was very much longer than the first; it was, too, more irregular, winding in and out in a perplexing manner.



[BLACK BESS IS WELL CARED FOR DURING TURPIN'S ABSENCE.]

It was not long before a very disagreeable circumstance forced itself upon their notice.

The bed of the stream sloped rapidly.

This downward tendency filled them with the utmost uneasiness, and they began to fear that after all they had got into these caverns, and that they should have great difficulty in emerging from them alive.

But neither spoke of this, although the thought was uppermost in the minds of each.

Down—downward the stream went, until it became difficult to keep their feet.

Indeed, it was only by clinging close to the rocks that they were enabled to do so.

A roaring noise, too, came to their ears, increasing in loudness every moment.

It was like that which they had heard upon emerging from the foundations of the mill.

And now a thought occurred to their minds of so awful a character that the pulsations of their hearts almost ceased.

It was Tom King who first spoke, though, when he raised his voice, his comrades knew well enough what he was about to say.

"Jack—Claude," he said.

"Yes, Tom," replied his companions, with difficulty raising their voices sufficiently to be heard above the roaring water.

"We are lost."

No pen could possibly describe the tone in which these three words were uttered.

"You fear, then—"

"I don't fear, but I am sure that we have got either into the vortex of a subterraneous whirlpool or cascade. Cling tightly to the rocks, or you will lose your footing. The water seems to rush by with more and more violence every moment."

"Can we retrace our steps?" said Claude.

"We can try, but I fear we have got too far down the treacherous current, and the bed of the stream is more slippery than ice."

"Let us try, then, at once," said Claude, "before we go further."

"Lead the way," said Tom King; "and be careful to secure your footing."

The three highwaymen turned round and made a desperate effort to retrace their steps along this underground stream.

But alas! the effort was a vain one.

Unconsciously they had approached the verge of a waterfall, and were in that portion of the stream which is called the rapids, from the great increase of the flow of the water just before it reaches the place of its descent.

It is well known how easy it is to be engulfed in a treacherous stream, even in broad daylight, so that it is no matter of surprise that our three friends, surrounded by darkness as they were, and under the excitement produced by the pursuit of the gendarmes, should not have discovered their terrible situation until too late.

It was not until Claude turned round and tried to return that he fully found how far they had been lured to their destruction.

The rapidity with which the water flowed seemed to have increased ten-fold.

And the bed of the stream, which rose with alarming rapidity, afforded not the least foothold.

Before, then, he was aware of such a catastrophe, he felt his feet give way beneath him, and himself carried with fearful swiftness down the stream.

He uttered a cry of horror, and made a terrific effort to clutch the point of some of the rocks which projected into the stream.

But the attempt was utterly futile.

He could not obtain a firm grasp of any one of them.

Sometimes he would take a precarious hold, but ere he could tighten it, the slippery rock would slip between his fingers, while he was carried with augmenting speed down the stream.

As we have said, the three highwaymen almost simultaneously turned round to retrace their steps. With difficulty they preserved their footing, until Claude lost his, and of course, the weight of his body coming against them had the effect of destroying their equilibrium.

Away, then, all three were swept like straws along the remorseless torrent.

In a little while they altered their endeavours to grasp the sides of the rocks in order to arrest their descent, to keeping into the middle of the stream, for they were continually receiving bruises from the sharp, jutting points.

How long they were drifted in this manner, they had no idea.

It was not for long, however, though, to them, the time seemed prolonged into an age.

Suddenly, and with an awful roar, they felt themselves carried with still greater rapidity forward, and then carried over a precipice.

They had long since given themselves up for dead men, for where else could that cataract fall but into the very bowels of the earth?

Down—down—they went, with a speed that almost deprived them of breath and consciousness.

Then they felt themselves plunged into a boiling seething mass of water, until there seemed to be tons of water upon them.

Then they rose to the surface—stunned, and almost insensible.

They did, however, possess sufficient instinct to crawl towards the side of the stream, and having done so, they lapsed into a swoon of so deathlike a character, that no one would have believed they lived.

In this state they continued for a long, long time.

Claude Duval, who was, perhaps, the most injured to hardships of various kinds, and who was gifted with the strongest constitution, was the first to recover his senses.

But for full two minutes after he returned to consciousness he was unable to recollect what had taken place, and where he was.

By degrees, however, recollection dawned upon him, and then he became aware that he had escaped from what he had made up his mind was inevitable death.

He was drenched to the skin, and he found that where he lay the descending water splashed over him.

His first thought was to seek for a light, but his immersion had effectually deprived him of all means of obtaining one.

Then he groped about in the intense darkness in the hope of finding his comrades, though he more than feared that they had perished, and that he was the only one who had escaped.

Presently he came in contact with something which he knew immediately to be a human form.

Passing his hands over it, he reached the face.

But the moment he touched it he was startled by hearing a loud cry.

He recognised the tones of that voice.

To his joy, Sixteen-String Jack was alive as well as himself.

A few rapid words passed between them, and then Sixteen-String Jack, who did not feel much the worse for his perilous adventure, assisted Claude to search for Tom King.

They found him at only a few paces distant, and so near the stream that if he had rolled over he must have fallen into it.

The darkness of the place they were in was most intense, but they succeeded, nevertheless, in removing Tom King from his perilous situation.

Then they adopted the best means within their reach to restore him to consciousness.

After a time they succeeded, and then the two, feeling much better, rose to their feet, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which environed them.

But the effort was a complete failure.

If they held up their hands close before their eyes, they could not perceive any trace of it.

Nor could they consequently see each other, so they adopted the very wise precaution of keeping hold of each others hands.

At that moment they would have given anything for a light, in order to ascertain what kind of a place they were in, and whether it had any outlet to it.

Perhaps they thought they had only been spared death by drowning in order to perish by one ten times more terrible.

But a light was out of the question. The water had put out the one they carried and inevitably damaged the materials wherewith they might hope to obtain another.

With a roaring, crashing sound the water continued to fall from the height above.

The highwaymen were all under the impression that they were very far down below the level of the surface of the earth.

To them the cascade down which they had fallen seemed to be hundreds of feet high, at the very least, though it is probable that the darkness led them into error upon this point.

Certain, however, it is that their position was an unpleasant and alarming one.

Destitute of light, and food, and tools, what chances had they of once more standing beneath the pure blue sky?

Very little, indeed, unless fortune should stand their friend.

For a long time our friends remained just as they were, casting their eyes around them, but still unable to see anything but the darkness, which to their strained vision, seemed to take all manner of strange and alarming shapes and roll rapidly towards them.

At length they agreed to step forward for a few paces, all three keeping in a straight line, and each one putting his foot forward and securing a footing before he moved the other.

This was certainly about the best thing they could do.

In this way they proceeded some distance, until, indeed, the loudness of the cataract had much diminished, so that they were able to make themselves heard without straining their voices.

They then again paused.

But still there was nothing that they could see.

Suddenly, however, Sixteen-String Jack uttered a cry which sounded like one of joy.

"Look," he cried, addressing his comrades. "Look."

"Look where? At what?" they asked, eagerly.

"Yonder—yonder. Straight before you. Cannot you see something which looks like a faint and tiny star?"

His two companions strained their eyes to the utmost, but were at first unable to distinguish the faint speck of light to which Jack alluded.

At length, however, they caught a sight of it, and

having once done so, could not be persuaded to take their eyes off it.

They were filled with joy when they saw it, for not one had any kind of doubt as to what it meant.

"Keep it steadily in view," they cried to each other. "Do not lose sight of it a moment, lest we should be unable to find it. Keep straight on towards it, for that will lead us to freedom."

With these words of encouragement on their lips, and their hearts full of hope, the three highwaymen stepped forward, still, however, taking the same precaution in their progress that they had done hitherto, namely, not to move one foot until they were certain of a secure resting place for the other.

In this way they went on and on for a long time, until that which looked at first so faint, and dim, and star-like, increased in magnitude and brightness, until at last they could see that it was really an opening in the rocks.

Through what kind of a place it was that they were making their way they had no idea.

It might have been some vast and spacious cavern, across which they were making their way out—it might have been a narrow passage only, extending but a few feet beside them.

The din of the cataract was now almost inaudible, which proved that the distance they had come was considerable.

Still they had a long way to go, for the opening must either be a very small one, or else at a great distance.

They found the latter to be the case, and, on a closer approach, saw that it was a rude natural arch, through which the stream of water flowed into the open air.

Thankful that its course was not, as they at first feared, directed into the very bowels of the earth, they once again committed themselves to the stream, for there were no means of passing under the arch on foot.

The stream was not, however, deep, nor had they far to wade through it.

In a few moments, to their intense satisfaction, our three friends stood upon dry ground, and with nothing but the sky above them.

It was broad daylight, and the sun was shining with full power and splendour.

Never before, in the whole course of their existence, had the face of nature looked so beautiful.

Certainly the spot at which they had emerged was about as lovely a one as could well have been imagined.

As far as they could see was a wide expanse of well-cultivated country.

To be sure, the summer had gone and the winter was close at hand, but still it was one of those bright, sunny mornings which even in mid-winter sometimes come and give us an idea of summer.

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK
AT LENGTH LAND UPON THE SHORES OF ENGLAND.

BUT our friends were soon recalled from their contemplation of the beautiful scene spread out before them by their thoughts.

Dangers had been avoided and perils escaped without injury, but, for all that, they were far from being in a position of security.

The gendarmes would not easily relinquish their search, after the determined opposition they had met with, and the mischief they had done.

They would, doubtless, scour the whole country for miles round.

Looking behind them, they saw that the arch underneath which they had passed, and through which the water flowed, was situated at the base of a high hill, doubtless the one upon the brow of which the ruined mill had been built, or else one contiguous to it.

On foot they would stand but a poor chance of escaping from the well-mounted dragoons, whose horses would by this time have rested sufficient^{ly} to recover from their fatigue.

But our friends were in a very uncomfortable situation. They were hungry and weary.

Their clothes were dripping with water, which was as cold as ice itself.

Every now and then they would shiver from head to foot.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Tom King; "we cannot stay here in such a condition as we are now, nor can we hide."

"But what, then, can we do?" asked his two comrades.

"We must endeavour to reach, unperceived by our foes, some small auberge where we can have shelter and accommodation. It will be easy to remove the suspicions which our appearance would be likely to excite, by saying that we had been capsize^d."

"We can try it. The chief difficulty will be to avoid the gendarmes, but, when that is done, the rest will be comparatively easy."

"Make haste, then. The gendarmes are doubtless searching all about for us, but then, if they are, we have a very good chance of escape, for they are nowhere in sight."

"Come on, then."

The three highwaymen set forward on their search for an auberge or inn.

It was not long before they came across a narrow sinuous lane, and, passing this, they shortly emerged upon a high road.

Somewhere along this they made no doubt they should be able to find what they sought.

But, having walked at least four miles without perceiving any more traces of what they wanted than they had seen at first, they began to grow disheartened.

Presently a peasant came in view.

He was trudging along with his eyes on the ground, but, upon hearing the sound of Tom's voice, who addressed him in French, he raised his head.

He looked surprised when he saw the appearance which his interlocutors presented.

Tom King had some trouble in making this fellow understand, and still more in understanding what he said in reply, for he spoke in one of the horrible barbarous dialects in the north of France.

But at length they gleaned that there was an auberge about a mile further along the road.

Tom tossed the peasant a small coin for his information, and with renewed vigour the three highwaymen continued on their journey.

The auberge was at length reached.

It was a small, poor-looking place, but still they thought it would answer their purpose.

Upon entering, Tom told the tale agreed upon, namely, that they had been out upon a pleasure excursion, and that the boat had unfortunately capsize^d. They had lost their way, being strangers in the neighbourhood, but would pay liberally for any accommodation afforded them.

This sounded a very plausible story, and the landlord of the auberge was completely taken in by it.

Perhaps the exhibition of a well-filled purse had something to do with his acquiescence.

However, be that as it may, our three friends were shown to sleeping chambers, and while there their clothes were taken and dried.

Fortunately for them, they seemed to have got quite out of the way of the gendarmes, who must have been searching another part of the country.

But the highwaymen stayed no longer than they were obliged because of the danger to which they exposed themselves.

Their clothes were brought to them thoroughly well dried and cleaned, and they put them on with the greatest satisfaction.

Then, descending the stairs, they called for refreshments, and dispatched a hearty meal.

They did not linger over it, however, and as soon as they had finished they prepared to start.

"The sooner we get away from here," said Tom King, "the better it will be for us, for there is no knowing how soon the gendarmes may make their appearance."

"That is uncommonly true, Tom," said Claude, "but we shall stand a poor chance of getting away from them if we have to travel on foot."

"We shall. What are we to do for horses?"

"I think it might very likely be managed."

"How?"

"Let us count up how much we are all worth in ready money. You must recollect I took a good-sized purse from the old man in the carriage."

"Oh! did you, Claude? I have been going to ask you what sort of luck you had, only the gendarmes were down upon us so soon that I have had no chance."

"Empty your pockets, and count up. I am in hopes we shall muster amongst us enough to buy three horses, and then we are off to England!"

"For one," said Sixteen-String Jack, "I shan't care how soon we get there. I am thoroughly tired of France."

"We are all the same about that, I think; but come, out with the money."

The highwaymen complied with this demand, and there was soon a goodly heap of coin upon the table.

Claude counted it, and, when he had finished that highly-interesting operation, he said—

"Good news, my friends. Unless horses are much dearer here than they are in England, we have enough money to buy three, and something to spare."

"Let us call the landlord, then, and ask him about horses for all three. Perhaps he can supply us."

"There is no harm in asking him, at any rate. Call him in."

The landlord was called, and, upon his making his appearance, he was questioned with respect to his capability for finding them with horses.

"I have three magnificent creatures in my stable," he said, "that have been left here for sale."

"How much each?"

"You shall come and look at them, and then we will talk about the price."

Our friends rose and followed the landlord to the stables at the rear of the inn.

Here they were shown three horses of middling quality.

But still, although not very handsome, they seemed of that tough, wiry sort, which can endure any amount of fatigue, and get over the ground at a rapid rate.

"How much do you want?" asked Claude.

"I cannot take less than seven hundred and fifty francs each for them."

"That is a long price."

"What?"

"I say they are dear."

"No—no. Cheap."

"How much is seven hundred and fifty francs in English money, Tom?"

"Thirty pounds."

"Then that is a great deal too much," said Claude, turning to the landlord, "but I tell you what we don't mind doing."

"What?"

"Why, we will give the money you ask, if you will throw the furniture into the bargain."

"Throw the furniture? I do not understand."

"I mean, we will give you thirty pounds apiece for the horses, if you will find saddles and bridles also for the same money."

The landlord hesitated for a moment, and, as he had been told to sell the animals for three hundred francs, he thought he could afford to give in, and accordingly he did so.

Saddles were found, and, in a few minutes the horses were ready for the road.

The reckoning was paid, and then, the three highwaymen feeling rather more like themselves, trotted out into the high-road, and made the best of their way to Boulogne.

This place they reached without meeting with any particular adventure worthy of special mention.

By Tom King's advice, they resolved upon a bold course of action.

That was to go to the appointed landing place like ordinary passengers, and take places for themselves and their horses on board the boat which plied between that port and Dover.

It is often the case that a bold course is the safest, and so it proved in this case.

In an easy, off-hand sort of way our friends secured their places and got on board.

Once there, however, they took care to keep as much out of sight as possible.

Another circumstance was in their favour.

It was quite dark when they got on board, and, of course, as the passage across the channel is a short one, it was dark when they landed.

It was, in fact, about an hour past midnight.

Somehow or other the English Channel had been very unfortunate to our friends.

They had never been upon it without meeting with some perilous adventure or another.

But this time they crossed without the occurrence of any incident whatever, beyond those which always take place upon such occasions.

The reader must please be good enough to bear in mind that the three highwaymen were in total ignorance of all the varied and extraordinary incidents which had befallen Dick Turpin since they parted with him at the entrance to the cavern where they had made a temporary stay.

They were full of anxiety respecting him, and much wondered what had taken place during the last interval when they had had so many narrow escapes from death.

Not for one moment, though, did they anticipate what had really taken place.

Little did they think that, at that very moment, Dick Turpin was an inmate of a cell in Newgate.

That little surprise was in store for them.

It is needless to say how much Dick was liked by his three comrades.

During the course of this history we have seen how they have all looked up to him as a superior spirit.

Indeed, he had, by general consent, been elected captain, the other three to form a band and act under his directions.

But circumstances had taken such a turn that this was never properly carried out, though the other three when they landed recollected it, and determined to have the arrangement renewed and fulfilled.

They did not know what obstacles even then stood in the way of it.

Whether they were eventually to accomplish their aim, time alone, the great unfold of all mysteries, can determine.

Full of these thoughts, and impatient to see their old companion, Claude and his party did not stay a moment longer at Dover than was necessary to land and get their cattle on shore.

As soon as this was done, they mounted and set off at full speed along the London-road, for it was in the metropolis that they thought Dick Turpin was most likely to be found.

To London, then, they directed their steps, nor did they halt until they had performed a considerable portion of the journey.

Of course the endurance of their cattle had a limit, and they were obliged to halt several times in order to allow them rest and food.

But no unnecessary time was lost.

On one of the occasions, when they halted at a roadside public-house, where they regaled themselves with some of the finest old October ale they ever remembered to have tasted, they received the first intimation of Dick Turpin's position.

They had not dismounted from their steeds, but sat in the saddle at the front door of the inn and had the ale handed to them.

They were waited upon by the landlord—a real jovial specimen of an Englishman—and his pretty daughter.

Mine host was inclined to be communicative.

"Are you much of travellers on the road?" he asked.

Of course, he was replied to in the affirmative.

"Then I have a piece of good news to tell you—if you have not heard it already. I don't suppose you have, for it has only just been brought down to me direct from London."

"No, we have heard nothing. What is it?"

"You'll rejoice, I'll be sworn. You will be able to perform your journey on the highway with more security and less risk than you have done for a long time past."

"How so?"

"Why, I have been told, upon the very best authority, that the notorious Dick Turpin, who has for so long past been a terror to all travellers on the road is—why, bless my life, how astonished you look!"

The landlord might well make the remark.

Upon the first mention of their old comrade's name, which they heard at a moment when they least expected it, neither of them could avoid exhibiting the surprise they felt.

But they would not allow the landlord to break off in

the middle of his sentence, but impatiently clamoured for him to continue it.

"Why, gentlemen, I didn't think his name would so much surprise you, but the fact is, Dick Turpin, the highwayman, is"—

"Yes—yes! What?"

"Safety lodged in Newgate."

"In Newgate?"

"Yes. I always said he would get there at last, and you see my words have come true."

"In Newgate is he?"

"Yes. I have no doubt about the correctness of my informer. He is in Newgate safe enough."

"When was he taken there?"

"Three days ago."

"Indeed; then it is quite recently?"

"Quite."

"Well, you saw we were surprised?"

"I did."

"I am not at liberty to tell you the reason of it, but it was a very good one. I may say, however, that we were in search of Dick Turpin, and at the very moment you spoke we were thinking about him."

"Indeed! Then you are officers?"

"Mum!" said Tom King, holding up his finger in a mysterious manner. "I can't say what we are. Be sure you don't say a word about what we have told you. Good morning."

"Hi! Stop!" said the landlord, as the highwaymen trotted off. "I'll be shot if you have told me anything!"

CHAPTER CCCIX.

DICK TURPIN DISCOVERS THAT, AFTER ALL, NEWGATE IS NOT SUCH AN UNCOMFORTABLE PLACE AS HE EXPECTED TO FIND IT.

HAVING brought the adventures of Turpin's three companions up to this point, we feel that we can leave them for a while, and turn our attention to Dick Turpin himself.

We suppose they have not forgotten where they saw him last.

He was seated in his dungeon in Newgate, reflecting upon the strange string of events which had terminated by his being placed there.

In this occupation he was interrupted by hearing the fastenings of his dungeon door undone.

Curious to see who it was that had come to disturb him so soon, Dick raised his head, and looked towards the door.

It was thrust open rather roughly, and a couple of men entered.

One was a turnkey, and the other was the man employed to go the round of the prison at certain intervals and supply the prisoners with food.

He put down a small pitcher of water just inside the cell, and a small loaf of contract bread upon the top of it.

Dick was hungry, but the sight of the fare set before him did not tempt him to eat.

But the regulations of the great city prison were very different then to what they are now.

Dick had money in his pocket, and he was well aware that while he had that he should not have to go short of luxuries.

So, when the man put down the pitcher, he said—in a tone of affected hilarity—

"Is that the best fare you can set before the prince of highwaymen? Nothing but water and black bread?"

"No offence, Mr. Dick," said the man, with as much deferential civility as he would have used if he had spoken to the governor himself; for among the officials of Newgate, Dick Turpin was looked upon as being a very distinguished character indeed. "No offence, Mr. Dick; only as *justice is justice*, why, of course, I was obligated to bring you the pervisions which the regulations pervides."

"Oh! I daresay it's all right."

"Oh! yes, it's all right."

"Well, I feel rather peckish. What could you get me for supper?"

"Anything your honour wants."

"Very well; here's a guinea. Get what you like that is nice, and you can keep what you have left for your trouble."

"That's right, your honour," said the man, as he took the coin from the highwayman's hand and slipped it into his pocket. "I don't want to get no profit out of you, captain, and I won't. You shall have the worth of your guinea, every hap'orth. You shall have a supper fit for a king."

"All right," returned Turpin, who was well aware of the policy of keeping on good terms with all the prison officials with whom he came in contact. "Treat me well. You will find it answer your purpose best."

"Lor' bless you, captain," said the man, looking towards the turnkey, "we know a real gentleman, don't we, Jim?"

"In course we does. We have seen plenty in our time, so we are able to judge."

"I suppose so," said Dick; "and now, as I feel rather hungry, the sooner you can get my supper the better I shall be pleased."

"What will you have to drink, captain?"

"Oh! some prime old ale, if you can get it."

"You can get anything here, captain, by paying for it."

"I suppose so. Well, here is another guinea. You can spend the first, and divide the second between you."

Highly satisfied with their prisoner's bounty, the men withdrew.

In about half-an-hour afterwards they returned, bringing with them as nice and tempting a supper as could possibly be imagined.

"Eat it in comfort, captain. The governor has gone out, so we shan't be troubled with him. Ah! times is sadly altered to what they used to be. I can hear talk, too, of fresh changes, but I hope they won't be in my time. Why, I actually heard that they intended to take our perquisites off us!"

"No," said Dick, sympathizingly, "you don't mean that?"

"I do, indeed."

"Then, it's too bad."

"That's what I said."

"It's infamous. However, what did you say about the governor just now?"

"I said that he had gone out, so we shouldn't be troubled with him just at present."

"Then, does he make himself busy in prying about the prison?"

"Oh! very. You never know when to expect him. Instead of keeping in his own room, like a governor, and leaving the proper *fishals* to look after the prison, he keeps poking about here and there and everywhere."

"But you expect to be free from him for a little while?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then I'll tell you what you shall do."

"Anything you like, captain, besides letting you out of this here place."

"You need not trouble yourself about that."

The man gave a knowing wink.

"I am speaking earnestly," said Turpin. "I have given my word of honour to the judge that I would make no attempt to escape."

"He means to get you off himself, then?"

"Well, I fancy he will try at it."

"And suppose he don't succeed?"

"Why, of course, that will be another matter. But, come, I have not said yet what I was going to say."

"What is it, captain?"

"Why, as you don't expect the governor just yet, I want you to sit down here and help me eat my supper."

"Lor', captain!"

"Don't refuse. I can't eat without I have company; so sit down and make yourselves at home."

Highly delighted with the invitation, the men sat down, and without any further pressing, commenced a vigorous attack upon the tempting viands before them.

Dick was hungry, and as the supper was of such a character that it would almost tempt the appetite of an epicure, it may be believed that he did ample justice to it.

As for the two turnkeys, somehow or other these gentry are always in feeding condition, and the quantity they put under their waistcoats was really alarming.

But still there was enough and to spare, for the meal was not only of so excellent a quality, but it was excellent in quantity—sufficient having been provided for half-a-dozen men at least.

During the dispatchment of this meal they beguiled the time with various reflections upon things in general. But above all, these men were struck with the nobleness which Dick had displayed by coming forward as a witness in the manner he did.

"Where is Adrian Winberry?" Dick asked, at length.

"Oh! he is safe enough. His cell adjoins yours."

"Does it?"

"Yes."

"Oh! which side?"

"That."

The turnkey pointed to the wall which was on your right hand as you entered the dungeon by the door.

"Oh! that is his cell, is it?"

"Yes."

"Does he know I am next door to him?"

"Oh! dear, no; and we should not think of telling him."

"Yet you have told me."

"Ah! but you and him are two different people."

"I suppose so."

"What we tell you we should not tell him; that's what I mean."

"I know. How does Adrian behave himself?"

"Like a wild beast."

"How is that?"

"He sits crouched up like a tiger, and when you enter his cell he looks at you like a maniac, but never offers a word."

"You seem rather afraid of him."

"Well, I shouldn't like to go within reach of his clutches, I can tell you."

"Is he chained?"

"Oh! yes, very heavily, and a good watch is kept upon him, because it is feared that, having powerful friends outside, he may attempt to escape—and perhaps get off."

"It will be an eternal disgrace to all in the prison if such a wretch is allowed to regain his liberty."

"Don't you be afraid of that. Such a strict watch is kept that he could not possibly go half-a-dozen steps without being seen."

"I should advise you myself to keep a sharp eye upon him. He might give you the slip, you know, and I am sure if anyone ever deserved a ride to Tyburn, he does."

"You are right, captain."

"How does he behave to you?"

"Like a wild beast, as I told you."

"Does he live on the prison fare?"

"Yes, what little he does eat."

"Oh! You never get anything for him?"

"Never."

"And never speaks?"

"No. So, in course, we don't speak to him. Why, if he was to lay down ten guineas for me to do for him what I have done for you to-night, I would say no."

"I am much obliged to you for your good feeling, I am sure."

"I would have done it for nothing for you, captain, if so be you was hard up and hadn't got no chink."

"I am well provided, though, as it happens," replied Dick, "though I thank you all the same. You will find I shall act liberally towards you."

"I know you will."

"Well, now then, what about Adrian's two accomplices—where are they?"

"Do you mean Norman and Sare?"

"Yes."

"They are in a couple of cells on the other side of the corridor."

"What do you think of them?"

"Why, I feel sorry sometimes."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I fancy they were led into the business without being aware of the nature of it."

"Well, I think so, too."

"Now, in my opinion, the worst one of the whole bunch is old Skinner, the lawyer, and I am afraid he will get off the lightest."

"I daresay he will."

"Don't you think he is the worst?"

"In one way I do."

"As how?"

"I think he put a great deal into Adrian's head which he never would have thought of himself."

"I am sure of it."

"Whereabouts have you put him?"

"He is in the next cell to Adrian Winberry."

"Then he is between us?"

"Adrian Winberry is."

"Yes. I mean Adrian Winberry is between us; I am in the cell on one side of him and Skinner in the one on the other side."

"Just so."

"But how comes it that we are all here in one place? These ain't the condemned cells, are they?"

"Oh! no."

"Well, that's where Adrian and his two accomplices ought to be."

"I know that, captain. But you see there is some repairs going on in that portion of the prison where the condemned cells are situated, and so we thought they would be safest here. Why, these are about the strongest cells in all Newgate."

"I suppose so."

"Because you are put in one of them?"

Dick nodded.

The turnkeys laughed.

"They want to take care of you, captain."

"Well, perhaps they had better; and I should also advise them to keep a very sharp eye upon all Adrian's movements."

"You needn't fear; but, captain"—

"What?"

"We must bid you good-bye."

"Oh! don't go yet; let's have a little more of your company, for I hate to be alone. Don't go the moment you have finished your supper."

"We should like to stay, captain, uncommonly; only, as I told you before, *jury is jury*, and if we stay here much longer, we shall have the governor popping in upon us, and, of course, if that was to be the case, why, we should have an end put, very likely, to all future meetings."

"Then go, by all means. Don't let me be the means of getting you into trouble."

"I think we had better start at once, then, captain."

"Very well, then. I shall see you at breakfast time?"

"Oh! yes. What should you like?"

"Anything. I am not at all particular, so long as it's nice. I'll pay you for it when you bring it."

"All right, captain; you may depend upon us."

"Can't you leave me the light?" asked Dick, as the men rose preparatory to leaving the cell, and took their lanterns in their hands.

"It breaks my heart to refuse you, captain."

"Can't you do it?"

"If I do I shall sure to be found out."

"How?"

"Why, there's a hole over the top of the door, and the light would come through into the passage, and if Mr. Cawthorn was to see it, I should lose my place, for he is awful strict."

"Take it away, then," said Turpin. "Don't get yourselves into trouble upon my account, only if you could have left the light, why, of course, I should have liked to have it."

"I know you would, captain, but we can't do it."

"Well, good night, then. And don't forget a good breakfast in the morning."

"All right, captain. Good night."

"Good night," said Turpin, again.

The two turnkeys who had shown themselves to be thus friendly disposed towards him, left the cell, and closed the door after them.

Then Dick was left in profound darkness.

It seemed doubly so after the light he had had, for, though not a brilliant one, still it was amply sufficient to illuminate the dungeon.

He was left in solitude, too, and Dick was of a sociable disposition, fond of company, and one who did not like solitude for long together.

And when the reverberations raised by the footsteps of the turnkeys as they walked along the passage died away, he was left in the most profound silence.

He was then in solitude, in darkness, and silence.

Not a single object was discernible in his cell, save the small grated aperture high up in the wall, through which a glimpse of the night sky could be obtained.

Dick groped himself towards the bed, and threw himself down wearily upon it.

The fatigue and excitement which he had so recently passed through had their effects upon him, and though at first his thoughts were busy, yet he soon lapsed into a sound slumber.

CHAPTER CCCX.

DICK TURPIN IS VISITED IN HIS CELL BY BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN.

AND so passed Dick Turpin's first night in Newgate.

To be sure it might have been much worse, for a prison is never a pleasant place for any one.

But, then, Dick was indulged in various ways.

He had supped as heartily and luxuriously as he could have wished to have done.

He was unfettered.

The bed upon which he lay was a hard one, but, then, he was used to inferior accommodation in that respect.

At any rate, he slept soundly enough, though his dreams were somewhat disturbed, being a distorted reflex of all the events which had recently occurred to him.

Daylight was streaming into his cell when he awoke, and he was able to have a better look at it than he was the night before.

It was built of huge blocks of masonry, clumped together at various places with bands of iron.

The window, or rather the hole which received that designatory appellation, was as high up in the wall as it could conveniently be put, considering the size of the cell.

It was very strongly barred. Indeed, so close were the pieces of iron put together, that a cat would have found it impossible to squeeze between them.

Nearly opposite this window was the door.

Dick's principal attention was given to this.

It seemed a miracle of strength and security.

The inner side was entirely covered over with sheet iron, and, where the pieces joined, they were lapped over for about a couple of inches, and then strongly riveted together.

Dick had heard how many daring spirits had succeeded in breaking out of Newgate, when their limbs were so loaded with fetters that they could scarcely walk, and he wondered however it had been done, or however the prisoner had had the heart to set about a task which presented so many apparently insuperable obstacles.

It might be that, at this moment, the thought occurred to him that he should have to owe escape from his cell to his own exertions alone.

He rose whether or not, and, going to the door, passed his hand over it, and endeavoured to shake it in its frame.

But he might just as well have tried to shake one of the massive stone walls.

He was quite as likely to succeed in one as the other.

This was his own opinion upon the subject as he paced up and down the cell.

It must have been early morning, for he could hear none of the officials astir.

The cell was very cold, and Dick's blood was chilled, but, after taking a few turns up and down, he succeeded in increasing its circulation.

He was thus engaged when he heard footsteps and voices in the corridor, and he came to the conclusion that his breakfast was about to make its appearance.

But he was disappointed.

He could hear the voices and footsteps, and he could hear the various cell doors in the corridor outside opened and closed.

At length they came to his, and the same turnkeys who had visited him the preceding night made their appearance.

One of them carried a large-sized tray covered with a beautiful white cloth, which was of itself quite appetising to look upon.

"Excuse us, captain," said the other, as he closed the door, "for keeping you so long; but the fact is, we thought we had better attend to the other cells first, so that we could come here last and wait upon you."

"All right," said Dick; "I am much obliged to you."

"What do you think of that, captain?" asked the other, as he removed the covering from the tray, and disclosed the tempting articles which were spread upon it.

"It's a first-rate," said Dick, as he rubbed his hands. "Sit down, and we'll make an attack upon it."

The men did not require to be told twice, so they sat down and began their breakfast.

There was just the same profusion as there had been the preceding evening.

There were viands of all sorts, and drinkables of various kinds.

Among the latter was some hot coffee, then not so common a breakfast beverage as it is now.

Dick was chilly, so he drank heartily of it, and it soon had a beneficial effect upon him.

The turnkeys were as much inclined to be companionable and pleasant as they were upon the former occasion.

As before, Dick asked after Adrian Winberry.

"He don't look as if he had had such a good night as you," replied one of the turnkeys.

"I have had a pretty good night," said Dick, "but the place is so infernally cold."

"Ah! cold nights is coming on now," replied the janitor. "I shall expect to hear lots of complaints."

"I should think so, if the other cells are as cold as this one is."

"As cold, captain! why there's some as would freeze the breath as it came out of your mouth; this here is reckoned one of the warmest cells in the prison."

"Then I ought to esteem myself lucky?"

"You ought, captain, for take my word for it, you might be lodged very much worse than you are."

"I daresay; but come, you don't eat!"

"Thankee, captain, I am getting on pretty well; now do you like your breakfast?"

"It is first-rate, and I hope I shall have as good a one as long as I am here, which I hope won't be for long!"

"Now, don't say that, captain."

"Oh! no offence to you, you know, but you understand."

"Oh! yes, captain, we understands."

"Is the day fixed for Adrian Winberry's execution?"

"Well, the warrant hasn't been delivered, I don't think; but I daresay they will be tucked up on the usual day."

"Monday?"

"Yes."

"Then they have got a short time of it. Does he seem to feel his position at all?"

"Not that I can see. He looks just like a wild beast, as I told you before, and how could you expect a wild beast to feel his position?"

"Why, not very well."

"Of course not. But we must go again, captain. It grieves us to leave you, but the governor's so strict."

"He is awful," said his companion; "and if he was once to find us here so friendly with you, the first thing he would do would be to put us on some other duty."

"I should be sorry for that," said Dick; "so pray take every care of yourselves. I would do anything rather than you should get into trouble on my account."

"Oh! captain, you are one of the right sort. It's a thousand pities that ever you should be here; but I shall never forget you, no, not to the longest day I live."

With these words the turnkeys left the cell.

"They are disposed to be friendly to me," muttered Turpin, when they had closed the door, "and I will take care not to offend them. I have heard it said that it is the worst policy to offend any one, let them be ever so humble; and I shall make it my study to keep on good terms with my jailors, for I fully believe in the truth of the saying. The day may come when I shall be glad to avail myself of their assistance—who knows?"

Dick paced up and down the dungeon as he spoke.

"I wonder what sort of success the judge will meet with in his endeavours on my behalf? I fear he will find the authorities very obstinate, for I have made myself notorious, and, at the same time, brought them into bad repute. Well—well, I must wait my time. I am not so uncomfortable here as I expected I should be, and no harm can possibly arise. I remain and await the current of events."

"It will be dreary work, though. I am not used to being cooped up between four stone walls—on the contrary, I have ever loved to have the pure, open sky above me. And Bess—bonny Black Bess—my matchless mare, without whom Dick Turpin would have been nothing—how is it I have forgotten her? I wonder how she has

fared lately? Well, doubtless, for the inmates of the Hall would, out of respect for the services I have done, attend to the wants of my steed."

If the reader will remember, upon the occasion of Dick's return to the Hall, which for distinction's sake, we may as well call Winberry Hall, he had delivered his mare Black Bess into the care of Shockley, the steward, who conducted her to the stables belonging to the mansion, whither Turpin himself followed him.

He had seen her carefully bestowed, and in addition gave the ostler a liberal gratuity.

So Dick did not feel much uneasiness and alarm respecting his mare.

He felt pretty sure she was safe and comfortable, and where his enemies would not think of looking for her.

Then Dick's thoughts, finding a rest here, travelled to his three companions.

"What a long time it is," he said, "since I parted from them. I wonder what vicissitudes they have had? Perhaps they are no more, and yet I can scarcely think that, for somehow or other, I have a presentiment that I shall see them soon. I wish they were here now, I should then feel more at ease than I do; and yet, what have I to fear? I must be still and bide my time.

"If they should return to England, how astounded they will be when they learn that I am here, and by my own free will, as I might say. They will recollect my oft-repeated words of preferring death to capture, and will wonder what has happened to cause me to alter my determination.

"They will never suspect, I fancy, for I will scarcely acknowledge it to myself. And yet why should I fill myself up with a hope that must, in the end, bring nothing but disappointment and despair? But I love her—I love her! I cannot help it. The feeling is one over which I have no control. I can arrest it by no effort of the will. I love her. I felt the change about my heart when I first looked into her face. But she is not for me, and never from my words or from my actions shall she glean the state of my affections towards her. I should be a baser villain than I am were I to do so. I can see she is possessed with a rare romantic spirit, which I cannot but think delightful, and which so well accords with my own.

"What a strange and romantic notion it was upon her part to seek me out, and yet how fortunate a circumstance it proved to be—if not for me, at least to those to whom Maud is endeared. Beautiful Maud, I love you—dearly, fondly, truly love you—but it is with that kind of adoration which one might pay to some dear object far, far above him, which it would be impossible for him to reach. I will be content with that distant worship.

"It is now that I regret that fate has made me what I am, and yet how can I help that. We are all creatures in the hands of destiny, and have our separate paths carved out. I was to be a highwayman, and a highwayman I am, and, I am free to say, a bolder one never took up his station upon heath or road.

"But oh! if I could blot out the past, not only from my own recollection, but the memory of all men! But why think of that? It is impossible, and therefore folly of me to do so.

"But if I cannot love Maud as I should wish to love her, if I cannot receive from her those sweet tokens of affection which would convert this life into Elysium, still I can be ever at hand unknown to her, watching over her, and shielding her from every peril with which she might be threatened. I will do that. I must be content with the lesser happiness which that will afford me.

"Yes, I will do it. I will be her guardian spirit, ever at hand to protect and shield her from all harm. Yes, that shall be the future occupation of my life; but no word to her, no sign even that would betray the secret of my heart."

Dick Turpin was much moved as he uttered these words, and something came into his eyes which made his vision dim and indistinct.

His voice grew husky, too, with emotion, and he struck his breast twice or thrice with his clenched hand, as though by that means he could subdue the agitation which tumulted beneath it.

Then he ceased his hasty walk, and sat down facing the grated window, upon the only movable seat there was in the place.

This was a rickety, ruddy-fashigued chair.

How long he thus sat, with folded arms, gazing out upon the piece of sky which he could see through the grating, he knew not, but it must have been for some time, for the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, and then declined towards the west, when a sunbeam found its way into the cell, and the excess of light caused him to turn his eyes away.

Then he became aware that he was about to receive an interruption.

The secumements of the dungeon door were one by one undone, and then it was thrown open.

Dick had scarcely curiosity enough to turn towards the door, and look who it was that was about to enter.

He quite made up his mind that it was his jailors bringing his mid-day meal.

But he heard a voice which showed him that he was mistaken in this supposition.

It was the voice of Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate, that he heard.

"This way, if you please," he said, in the most deferential tones. "This way, if you please, ladies. Be careful of the step."

Then the governor made his appearance in the cell, ushering in some one who was as yet invisible.

When he heard the words he uttered, however, and the rustling of silk in the passage, a wild kind of hope sprang up in Dick's breast, which gave him so much delight that he could scarce contain himself.

The reader will no doubt understand his feelings.

Could it be possible that she who had become so dear to him—with whom his thoughts had been so long and busily engaged, and who was uppermost in his mind—could it be possible, he asked himself, and his heart beat rapidly as he did so, that she had remembered him, and had come to visit him in his lonesome prison-house.

Feverishly and eagerly Dick had risen to his feet.

He clenched the back of the chair upon which he had been sitting with his left hand, and, by tightening his grasp, strove to conquer his emotion.

With a burning gaze he looked towards the door, in order to ascertain whether his presentiments were true.

He was not kept long in suspense.

In reality it was not a moment, though to him it seemed ten times as long.

The governor had preceded the visitors along the passage by a few steps only, and in courtesy entered the cell first.

Dick's anticipations were not mistaken.

There was a light step, and he then saw standing before him Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman.

"A couple of visitors," said the governor, briefly, and as he spoke, he left the cell.

With his senses in a whirl, and with the sound of her voice murmuring like sweet music in his ear, Dick Turpin, still keeping his hold upon the back of the chair, placed his right hand upon his heart, and bowed deeply and respectfully to his fair visitants.

Ere we relate what took place between them, we will go back a little and narrate the causes of their being there.

CHAPTER CCCXI.

BLANCHE WINBERRY MORE THAN SUSPECTS THE NATURE OF MAUD'S SECRET.

It was quite dark and late at night when Shockley, the steward, drew up at the door of Winberry Hall.

During the whole of their ride from London, Maud and Blanche had sat in the carriage in silence and in tears.

Scarcely a word passed between them during the whole of their journey; their hearts were too full to allow them to speak, although they had so much to communicate to each other.

Blanche especially was much cast down.

She had suffered greatly since her abduction, and in her own account of what happened to her she stated how, during the latter portion of the time, she had been upon the very verge of starvation.

And there is scarcely any instance when the body and mind suffers separately. Indeed, it may be asserted that there is no ailment of the body, however trifling, which does not produce corresponding and proportionate influence upon the mind.

Feebleness of body is always attended with feebleness



[CLAUDE DUVAL'S STRUGGLE WITH THE POLICE-OFFICER.]

of mind, and that is the reason why strong men, and Englishmen as a rule, are so strong in all their opinions and prejudices.

Debilitated, then, to no ordinary degree, Blanche Winberry, as soon as her escape was accomplished, without resting scarcely a moment, undertook a fatiguing journey to the Hall, only to learn upon her arrival there all the disastrous and painful events which had happened during her absence.

Distracted with grief and maddened with excitement, we have seen how she posted back to London, determined to make her way to the trial.

We have seen, too, how she forced her way into court at a most critical moment.

Then she had to go through the long and trying ordeal of an examination in the witness-box.

And not only that, but to proceed to the ante-room and identify the body of her murdered father.

Oh! it was terrible and soul-crushing.

What, except the deep love she had for her parent, and

the sense of duty towards society, would have sustained her through that awful day?

Then came the terrible discovery that her lover was the son of her father's murderer!

And yet she was sustained. See seemed, indeed, endowed with a strength of mind that was absolutely super-human.

Not once had she faltered, or wavered, or broken down, but had given her evidence clearly, straightforwardly, and truthfully.

Still she bore up, and then, last of all, there came that terrific scene of confusion in the courthouse, where the crowd made the frantic effort to rescue their favourite, Dick Turpin, from the clutches of the myrmidons of the law.

And so, when she got into the carriage, what matter for wonder is it that she at once gave way, and sank under her accumulated trials.

On her return home, however, she succeeded in somewhat composing herself.

But the hour was so late that they proceeded without delay to the sleeping-chamber they occupied in common, and had done from their earliest childhood.

Many days had elapsed since they last shared it, however, and this thought came to the minds of both of them as they threw themselves into each other's arms, and indulged in a warm and affectionate embrace.

It was an antique room in which they stood, and well in keeping with the exterior of the hall, which was quaint and old-fashioned.

The small hand-lamp they had brought with them had been placed upon the old broad mantle-shelf, in its accustomed position.

But the light which came from it was quite inadequate to illuminate the distant corners of the vast apartment, in which the dispersed darkness seemed to accumulate in large and weirdlike masses.

On this occasion, however, the light of the lamp was rendered more than usually useless, for a full moon that was shining brightly in a southern sky, her lustre undimmed by a single cloud, poured her rays full into the chamber, distinctly revealing the figures of the two young grief-stricken girls.

It was a very large-sized window, and filled with innumerable diamond-shaped panes.

Some of these were of uncoloured glass, while others were beautifully stained in many colours, and elaborately embellished.

And as the bright, pure, silvery beams of the moon passed through these, they acquired their tint, borrowing their colour from them, and fell with a beautiful effect upon the polished oak flooring of the chamber.

For a few moments the two lone creatures remained in that embrace, speechless and motionless.

Then Maud, making a great effort, raised her hand from Blanche's shoulder, and, passing her arm round her waist, said—

"Come, Blanche; we shall be calmer then."

It was evident the fair and beautiful girl understood what her companion meant, for, rousing herself slightly, she moved in the direction of the window.

Maud half-supported her.

It was a bow-window, one of that ancient make, so commodious and yet so pleasant.

The recess in it was as large as a small apartment, and all round, at a convenient height, was a broad, polished, oaken seat.

Upon the floor, and against that portion of the seat which was under the front part of the window, was a velvet cushion.

In the darkness and shadow it could not have been seen by any one save those who knew of its existence there.

But Blanche and Maud did not look for it even. They knew its exact position, and so, upon reaching the window, with their arms still encircling each other's waists, they sank down on their knees upon it.

Then clasping their hands over their faces, and resting their arms upon the window-seat, they prayed silently and fervently.

It was a beautiful and touching spectacle to see these two young girls, so utterly alone as they were, thus prostrating themselves in adoration to and communion with their Creator.

As they knelt thus, the bright rays of the moon fell with full force and brilliancy upon them, revealing every outline of their features with a distinctness that was remarkable.

And so, in the silence of this vast and antique chamber, they knelt and prayed for aid and strength and assistance in their troubles to Him who alone could vouchsafe such blessings to them.

And the soothing beneficial of calm and holy prayer soon made itself manifest upon them.

After thus pouring out their souls in fond devotion, their hearts grew gradually lighter and their troubles less.

But still they knelt and prayed until they were perfectly composed.

Then, raising their heads, they once more threw their arms about each other's waists.

Now they found they were able to speak calmly, though very, very sadly over what had happened.

Blanche Winberry's lip quivered, and her voice tremble

more than once, for her trials and sufferings were almost more than she could bear.

But she grew better after confiding them to her old playmate Maud.

The latter, however, could not follow reproaching her for the secret she had kept so closely locked within her bosom, for, until she had heard her say as much in the court, Maud had no idea that Blanche had got a lover, with whom she had secret assignations.

"Forgive me, Maud," said Blanche, the tears ready to start from her eyes. "It is the only secret I have ever kept from you, and I have suffered enough for it. Oh! what an unhappy, wretched girl I am. What have I done to merit such a cruel fate?"

"Do not repine, Blanche, darling. There is One above who ordains all for the best, though we, afflicted with soul-blindness, cannot see it. I forgive you, Blanche, though it was unkind of you. But that is all past now."

Blanche let her head fall upon her companion's shoulder. "Do not rise yet, Maud, but tell me all that has happened during my absence. Don't omit anything, how trifling; I shall feel more at ease then, for you cannot think how anxious I feel."

Maud complied with the request, for, being so strongly urged, she feared to refuse it.

But, as the reader is already acquainted with the whole of the particulars from first to last, it is not needful to set down at length all that Maud said.

But she dwelt greatly upon the nobleness of Dick's conduct in behaving in the manner he did, and drew such a picture of the celebrated highwayman, that, when she had done, Blanche felt scarcely a secondary interest in his welfare to Maud.

All that Dick had done, all that he had said, was elaborately described. From the way in which each incident was given, and none forgotten, it was evident how deep a root they had taken in her memory.

From the love she bore her father, Blanche felt grateful to this unknown man for the manner in which he had given his testimony in his behalf, and brought the guilty ones to justice, and when she learned the result of his noble self-sacrificing behaviour, she was filled with pity.

"Oh!" she cried, "he must not perish, he must be set free. My father had influence with the authorities, he was beloved and respected by them all, and doubtless they will listen to the supplications of his daughter."

"And shall you really interest yourself, and do the best you can towards obtaining his release from his imprisonment, dear Blanche?" said Maud, gently, as she pressed her companion more closely to her bosom.

"Certainly I will, for I feel that my duty, if not my sympathies, require it of me."

"Oh! I am so glad to hear you say that, Blanche, dear. I know you can do so much if you only try."

"How anxious you are. Do you desire his freedom so very much?"

"I do, indeed. Oh! Blanche, if you could but see him! He looks so noble and so handsome, and when he speaks it is so gently, and his voice sounds like music. And he looks so well, too. He is so strong and vigorous, and look as though he could protect any one. I don't believe any danger would daunt him, and"—

"Maud!" interrupted Blanche, raising her head, and striving to obtain a glimpse of her companion's face. "Maud, do you know what you are saying?"

Maud made no reply, but buried her countenance still deeper in her shoulder.

Blanche continued—

"Why, Maud, if you were to speak about any one else but a highwayman like that, I should think"—

"Think what?"

"That you were in love with him; but as it is, I know it is impossible that you could forget your dignity so far."

"You are right, Blanche," said Maud, with a sigh, "you are quite right. If he was anything but what he is I should love him; I could not help it, nor you could not help it if you were to see him and be with him as I have been. Oh! it is a thousand pities that one so gifted with noble qualities as he is, and with such a self-sacrificing spirit as he evidently possesses, and with so much single-mindedness, it is a thousand pities that he should ever be a highwayman."

"It is, Maud, darling," said Blanche, who was far more pathetic than her cousin; "but you must not let your

feelings carry you too far. You must recollect what he is, although he has done us such a service, and he must be content if we show our gratitude by procuring his release.

"Oh! if we could but accomplish that!"

"You heard what the judge said?"

"I did."

"Well, then, let us try to rest, and in the morning when we rise, we will go to London and call upon this judge, and ask him what success he has met with, and inform him of our intention of interesting ourselves for him to the utmost."

"Will you do that, Blanche, dear?—will you do that?"

"Yes, certainly; but you must come to bed at once, and wait patiently until morning."

With a heart considerably lighter than she had had for many hours, Mand complied.

But she could not rest, let alone rest in patience.

Her mind was filled with the image of the highwayman who had made so deep an impression upon her heart.

In fact, although she denied it to her own heart, Mand loved him.

She strove to call in her reason to banish the idea—to conquer it.

But in vain.

She felt that she loved, and that without any power upon her part to prevent it.

But she resolved to keep a close guard upon her feelings.

Not for one moment did she dream of allowing her passion to become known. She determined to nurse it in silence.

Her pride, position, and dignity, all forbade her to be anything more to the bold highwayman than she then was.

But she would nourish his image in secret.

How she kept repeating to herself all through that weary night as she tossed restlessly upon her couch, that the object of her love had been anything but what he was.

She felt that if such had been the case, she could have permitted a little hope to have access to her heart, but now she was compelled to utterly preclude it.

Not for one moment did the thought occur to her that Dick's feelings were precisely similar to her own. It never once occurred to her mind to take that view of the case.

If she had done so, it is hard to say in what way she would have acted.

However, the morning came at length, and then she rose and carefully attired herself.

Blanche, too, although she scarcely felt herself equal to the task, rose and attired herself also, for she saw how Mand had set her heart upon her journey, and she had too much regard for her feelings to disappoint her if she could possibly help it.

But there was another cause for Mand rising so early as she did on that particular morning.

While lying awake, she all at once recollected that Turpin's mare Black Bess was at that moment, or, at all events, ought to be in the stables attached to the hall.

She was no stranger to the numberless wondrous deeds which were ascribed to the highwayman's steed.

She knew, too, how often she had been told that her rider was indebted solely to her exertions for his countless escapes from death and capture.

But, most of all, she was aware of the anxious consideration for the welfare of Black Bess which Turpin manifested during his stay at the hall. She remembered every eulogistic word which he had uttered respecting her, and how he attended to her wants with his own hand.

And Mand determined that, now that Turpin was imprisoned and incapable of performing all those little offices which he would have done if he had been free, she would take his place in that respect, and personally see that the noble animal was well cared for and allowed to want for nothing.

And it was after making this determination that she rose from her bed so early, having made up her mind to lose no time in carrying her resolve into execution.

Long, then, before Blanche was ready, she had dressed herself and, muttering some words of excuse, hastily descended the stairs.

MAUD GOULDMAN AND BLANCHE WINBERRY SET OUT FOR LONDON, AND HAVE AN INTERVIEW WITH THE JUDGE.

ALTHOUGH the hour was such an early one, yet Mand found, when she went down, that the few domestics who were employed at the hall were all astir, and they greeted her with a kindly word, for Mand was universally liked by all the household for her unaffected and charming manner.

But hastening on, Mand passed out of the door in the rear of the hall, and crossed the large yard in the direction of the stables, which were built at some considerable distance from the residence.

The whole place was very familiar to Mand, for, being of so gentle a nature as she was, she was, of course, fond of animals. Above all, however, horses were her favourite pets, and in happy days past she had spent many an hour in the stables, feeding and caressing them.

Accordingly she made her way in a direct line to the stable door.

It was open, and the groom was there.

He touched his cap respectfully when he saw Mand.

The stables belonging to Winberry Hall were models of construction. They were light, high, and well ventilated, while each horse was allowed plenty of room in his stall.

Mand did not require to be told which was Black Bess. It was impossible for that noble creature to be confounded with any other. The elegant symmetry of her form, the sleekness of her skin, and the proud arching of her neck, and the flashing of her eye, all testified the excellence of her breed.

Without fear or hesitation, Mand walked up to the beautiful animal, and stroked and patted her on the neck.

Bess neighed, and evinced signs of pleasure and satisfaction. She was accustomed to the caresses of her master.

With her own hands, then, Mand fed her.

The groom looked on with a smile.

"That's a beautiful creature, miss," he said, respectfully.

"Beautiful, indeed. For my sake, Robert, I hope you will pay her every attention, and see that she wants for nothing. Her master is a friend of mine, and will be absent for a time. During the period, however, his steed will remain here, and I have promised to be responsible for its proper treatment until his return."

"You leave it to me, miss. I'll give you my word she shall go short of nothing. I have seen a good deal of horse flesh in my time, but that caps all of it. Do you say the owner of it was a friend of yours, miss?"

"Yes, Robert."

"Well, miss, if you hadn't have said that, do you know what I should have thought?"

"No."

"What I should have been ready to lay a wager about?"

"No."

"Why, that that was no other than Dick Turpin's celebrated mare, Black Bess."

"Black Bess?"

"Yes, that is the only steed I have ever heard of that could come up to this, but, of course, it can't be, because you say it belongs to a friend of yours."

"Exactly so, Robert; so don't let me hear any more such foolish gossip. I wonder what he would think if he knew his favourite steed was taken for a highwayman's!"

"Oh! no offence, miss. You will excuse me for making the remark, for do you know, at one time or other, feeling a good deal of interest in horses, I have heard such a lot about this Black Bess, and the wonderful things she has done, that I really thought to myself when I saw this mare, 'that is exactly what I picture Black Bess to be like,' and the funniest thing, too, is that she is all black, and, if you pat and stroke her and say 'Bess,' she really seems as though she knew what it meant, and that that was her name."

"Well, Robert, you quite surprise me. Now you speak of it, it does seem rather singular; but, Robert,"

"Yes, miss."

"I beg you will not say a word about this to any one, because, if it was to get to the ears of our guest, he would be highly offended, and I should be very sorry for that, because he is a particular friend of mine."

"All right, miss, I won't say a word. I shouldn't have mentioned it to you, only I thought it was so singular."

"Then, do not let that be a reason for your mentioning it to any one else."

"No, miss, I won't. You can depend upon me."

"I will, Robert; and I trust you will prove yourself worthy to be depended upon. Above all," she added, "let me hear no more such remarks as you have made to me."

The groom touched his hat in silent acquiescence.

Maud then left the stable.

But, as soon as she had gone, Robert looked at Black Bess with a puzzled and dissatisfied air, as he muttered—

"Dang me if I can understand this here business. There's summat in it. I am sure there is summat in it. But dang me if I can find it out. However, Maud's the word, since Miss Maud desires it."

On her part, Maud, when she got out of the stable, murmured in a low tone—

"Oh! what shall I do? He seems already to be suspected, and it will never do for him to come here and reclaim his mare, even if he succeeds in getting his freedom. Oh! what shall I do? I will see him, and tell him all that has taken place, and ask him for his advice."

With a look of the greatest anxiety upon her fair forehead, Maud entered the Hall.

Upon proceeding to the breakfast-room, she found Blanche already there awaiting her.

But she said not a word respecting the manner in which she had been engaged, and luckily Blanche was too much immersed in her own thoughts and griefs to make the inquiry, so she was spared the necessity of owning the truth or inventing any excuse.

There was much to occupy Blanche's mind.

Until that moment when the horrible disclosure was made, she had no idea how much she loved young Adrian Winberry.

Now, however, she felt that he was twined round her heart in such a manner that she could not tear him from it without destroying it.

She felt, nevertheless, that she could never be the bride of the son of her father's murderer, yet, at the same time, she was conscious that she could not be the bride of another.

His image was prominent in her mind before everything else, and though she strove to turn her thoughts to other subjects, she found, upon every occasion, that the effort was a vain one.

Breakfast was partaken of in almost perfect silence.

When it was over, Blanche summoned Shockley, and told him her destination.

"I have been to the coachman before," he replied, "and perhaps I had better perform the part again."

"I should feel so much more at ease if you would, Shockley," said Blanche.

"I will, then, miss, and the carriage shall be at the front door as soon as ever it is possible for me to get it ready."

With these words on his lips, the faithful servitor withdrew from the presence of his young mistress.

By the time they were attired, Shockley was waiting.

Entering the carriage, they directed him to drive to Mr. Kersey's, in Red Lion-square.

Upon arriving here, they found the lawyer was not at home.

This was a disappointment, for they fully expected to learn from him the name and address of the judge who had promised to interest himself upon Dick Turpin's behalf.

However, undaunted by this, Blanche went to Newgate, and obtained the information she required from Mr. Cawthorne, the governor, who received her with the greatest civility, for it was always, in his opinion, good policy to be friendly with those whose friendship was worth having.

The name of the judge was Holycak, and his residence was situated in the Oxford-road.

To this place, then, Blanche directed Shockley to drive.

The hour was quite an early one when they arrived.

But, nevertheless, the inmates of the judge's house were all astir, and, upon sending in their names, an audience was immediately granted to them.

They were shown into a room plainly yet handsomely furnished.

The walls were lined with books, and the table in the centre of the apartment was covered with papers.

The judge rose from his seat, and politely placed chairs for his two visitors, then sat down and prepared himself to listen to what they had to say.

Without any preface or circumlocution, Blanche began to speak upon the subject which had brought him there.

"You doubtless recollect me, sir. Do you not?" she asked.

"Yes," was the reply. "You appeared in the extraordinary trial which was brought to a conclusion yesterday, and announced yourself to be the daughter of the man whose murder we were then investigating."

"Precisely so," said Blanche, in a failing voice, for these words brought vividly back to her mind all the painful occurrences connected with the trial.

"And you, if I mistake not," continued the judge, indicating Maud Gouldman, "also gave important evidence at the commencement of the trial in question."

"I did, sir," she replied.

"Then may I inquire the nature of the business which has brought you here so early this morning?"

This question was more particularly addressed to Blanche, and she at once replied to it.

"I will tell you, sir, and in as few words as I possibly can. I am sure you recollect that during the trial a witness came forward, and, at the sacrifice of his own life and liberty, delivered his testimony."

The judge nodded.

"You allude to Dick Turpin," he said.

"I do, sir, for I find that is who he is. He is quite a stranger to me, though my companion, Maud, singularly enough, encountered him, and one by one these things came out."

"The encounter was an accidental one?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I do not see that matters much just now, so, with your permission, we will waive that part of the question."

"I do not wish to take up any more of your time than I can possibly help. I was about to say that, being the only daughter of Mr. William Winberry, I cannot help feeling that, highwayman as he is, a deep debt of gratitude is due from me to him."

"I think so, too; for the evidence he gave was all important and conclusive. Had it not been for him, we should never have known the precise manner in which the deceased was murdered, nor so certain who were the guilty persons."

"You will see, then, sir, that I feel myself under a great obligation to him."

"Just so."

"And I am desirous of repaying it. Now, from your manner at the trial, and what I subsequently heard, you seemed inclined to intercede for him."

"I not only seemed inclined, but gave my word to exert all the influence which I possess, and when you entered, I was at that moment engaged upon the business."

"I am glad to hear so much, sir. Have you any hope that you will be successful in your efforts?"

"I have. In the first place, coming direct from me, the application will have great weight, and moreover, I know just how to put it into its proper channel."

"I trust you will succeed, sir," said Blanche, earnestly; "for if he was to perish in consequence of what he has done, it would be a source of the deepest grief to me, and therefore I had determined to question you upon the point, and ascertain your opinion whether he would be more likely to be released if I personally came forward in his favour?"

"What could you do?"

"My father was a man who had much influence in the city, and who was much respected by the greatest men who dwelt there, and so I thought that if I, as his daughter, presented myself before them, they could not refuse to listen to my supplications."

"They would listen to you, no doubt, but that, I am afraid, would be all you could accomplish. I am sorry to put a damp upon so laudatory an undertaking, but really I do not think that the amount of good you could effect would be of any importance, and most certainly would not recompense you for your trouble."

"My trouble, sir, I think nothing of."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. But I can put you in the way of doing Turpin more service than you could by your single exertions."

"Let me know what it is, sir, and judge of my sincerity by the readiness with which I promise to do it."

"I have here a petition addressed to the highest authority in the land, which I have had carefully drawn up. In it the whole of the circumstances are clearly and expressly stated, and the conduct of the highwayman throughout the course of the trial expressly dwelt upon. I have only just received the document from the hands of the person I instructed to prepare it, and have just finished perusing it. I consider it exceedingly well calculated to answer the purpose required. The deed is as yet unsigned. Now, if you, the daughter of Mr. Winberry, would be the first to sign it, I think your name would have great effect in inducing others to sign it likewise."

"Do you, sir? then I will write my name at once, and Maud, too. She shall write her's as well."

The judge spread the petition out smoothly upon the table, and, giving Blanche a pen, directed her where to sign.

With trembling fingers she obeyed.

Maud came forward next, full of eagerness to do anything that would help the highwayman out of his present perilous situation.

With a firm hand she wrote her name immediately beneath that of Blanche.

"And you think," she said, "that we have done more good by signing our names there, than we could do if we were to attempt to get up a similar petition ourselves?"

"I do. Leave the affair in my hands, and you may depend upon my doing all that could possibly be done."

"I am much obliged to you, sir, and we shall rely upon you."

"Pray do so."

"But there is another favour I should like to ask of you," said Maud.

"Speak," replied the judge, "and, if it lies in my power, it shall be granted."

"Can you write an order that will allow us ingress to the prison, so that we can have an interview with Turpin?"

The judge was silent for a moment, and then he said:

"Your request seems a strange one. What is the motive for your visit?"

"Merely to thank him for what he has done, and assure him that we will do and are doing all we can for him."

"Such a motive as that is right enough, but, if I give you this order, pray do not, through any mistaken idea of kindness towards the prisoner, in any way abuse it. I mean, as to supplying him with tools, or in any way assisting him to make his escape."

"You may rely upon our doing nothing of the kind," said Maud, earnestly. "But do not refuse me the order for admission."

The judge seemed full of surprise at this request.

He hardly knew what to think of Maud.

However, as she had given him her word not to make any improper use of it, he could not well refuse, so he wrote an order to the desired effect.

Upon receiving it, the young girls again expressed their thanks for the trouble he had already taken, and thus the interview terminated.

CHAPTER CCCXIII.

DICK TURPIN'S INTERVIEW WITH BLANCHE WINBERRY AND MAUD GOULDMAN.

ARMED with this pass, Maud Gouldman felt ten times more happy than ever she had done in her life before.

Blanche and herself entered the carriage, and instructed Shockley to drive them direct to Newgate.

When Maud made the application to the judge for an order to visit the celebrated highwayman in Newgate, Blanche was completely taken by surprise.

She had no idea that her companion was about to prefer such a request, but when she made it of course she could not well step forward and interfere.

But she viewed the act with very great uneasiness, and she felt convinced that the suspicion which had dawned upon her mind on the preceding evening, that Maud felt

a warmer interest in the highwayman than she ought to do, increased in consistency and strength.

"Maud!" she said, when the carriage had been set in motion.

"What, Blanche?"

"I had no idea that you were going to ask the judge for an order to visit this Turpin in Newgate."

"Had you not? I thought we had come to the resolution to do so last night."

"No, I cannot remember that a word was said about it."

"But surely you cannot be vexed at having the opportunity afforded you!"

"To see this highwayman?"

"Yes. Not to gratify any curiosity you might feel upon such a point, but to thank him as a daughter ought for all that he has done. You must remember he has sacrificed his liberty for you, if not his life; for I do not for a moment buoy myself up with the hope that the judge, influential though he may be, will secure for him a full pardon."

"What then?"

"He might save him from death; but if he does, it will only be for the lingering punishment of perpetual imprisonment."

"And is it possible he has done all this for my sake?"

"Yes; and yet not altogether for your sake, either. He has done it for the sake of justice, and in order that so base a villain as Adrian Winberry should not achieve a perfect triumph. He would have slain you, or something worse, and would have taken possession of the estates, had it not been for the intervention of this highwayman."

Blanche sighed.

"I am afraid it would have been so," she said.

"I am sure of it; but you see, by sacrificing himself he has prevented that, and surely it would not be too much for you to pay him a visit, and in person thank him for all that he has done on your behalf, and assure him of the exertions which are being made for his preservation."

"It seems you thought so."

"I did, and I thought as well that I ought to do just as I have done, and here we are before the walls of Newgate. Do not go against your inclination. Do you feel desirous of expressing your thanks?"

"Yes," said Blanche; "as we have the order we will make use of it."

At this moment Shockley appeared at the door of the carriage, and opened it.

The reader must not fall into the mistake of thinking that Blanche Winberry was unwilling to utter her thanks to the generous witness.

On the contrary, she would have done anything in order to obtain an interview with him, but it was Maud that made her hesitate and draw back.

She feared that an impression had been made upon the susceptible heart of the young girl, and she dreaded anything to take place which would tend to deepen it.

But now that she was at the grim portals of Newgate, and was authorised to pass through them, she thought she would avail herself of the chance afforded her, but at the same time determined that Maud should never pay another visit if she could possibly help it.

Accordingly, when Shockley held the door open, she alighted, but not until after Maud had done so.

Upon presenting the order, they were immediately admitted into the lobby of the prison, but were not permitted to go any further until Mr. Cawthorn was sent for.

The governor was not long in making his appearance.

He saluted them with the utmost respect, and upon the order being handed to him, he called a turnkey, and proceeded to escort the fair visitors to the cell himself.

We have seen how the governor led them in, and then retired. We have also seen how Turpin respectfully saluted them.

It is at this point that we resume.

By a great effort Dick regained possession of himself. With another and yet deeper bow he said—

"To what circumstance, ladies, may I attribute the honour of this visit?"

"You know us, I presume," said Blanche.

"I do, lady. You revealed yourself at the trial as the

daughter of the unfortunate Mr. Winberry, and your companion I have already had the pleasure of seeing many times."

"You are correct, sir."

"Pray pardon me," said Dick. "I am a rough, rude man, and but little accustomed to the usages of polite society. The accommodation offered by this cell is slight, yet before this I should have asked you to be seated."

"Nay, never mind," replied Blanche; "we would rather stand. I have come here because I felt that I was under a deep obligation to you. The service you have rendered me is a great one, a very great one, and no words of mine would ever be sufficient to express my gratefulness for the chivalric manner in which you have acted."

"I need no thanks," said Dick, "though, at the same time, I cannot but feel pleased at hearing you express them. Still, at the same time, I feel deeply honoured to think that you should have sought out the highwayman in his cell to express your obligations to him."

"I cannot do so in words," continued Blanche, much struck with Turpin's gentlemanlike behaviour, "but I have chosen to do it in another way. I have just had an interview with the judge who presided at the trial. He is exerting himself immensely in your favour, and I have lent all the assistance in my power. If the object sought for is not achieved, it will not be from any negligence upon our part. I have great hopes myself, however, that this, so far from turning out an unlucky event for you, will prove a fortunate one."

"I sincerely thank you," said Dick, "sincerely thank you. Indeed, I cannot attempt to express my feelings. In this matter, although a highwayman, and with the hands of all men raised against me, yet I have merely acted in the manner which a sense of honour prompted me to act. I will not say, however, that I anticipated being made the inmate of this dungeon. My own conviction was that protection would be extended to me, and that I should at least be allowed a chance of my life."

"I should have expected the same thing, and yet, in one way, you have the chance you speak of. The representations of the judge, made as they will be in the proper quarter, cannot fail to have a great effect, and I trust that the end will be that you will be allowed to pass out of the portals of this prison a free man, and with nothing to fear as the consequence of your past deeds."

Dick shook his head.

"I should not like to buoy myself up with such a hope as that. I am afraid it would be expecting too much. Be under no apprehension, however, about my life. Until the result of what the judge is doing is known, I have given my word of honour not to make any attempt to escape. But, when that result is known, and it should be unfavourable to my life and liberty, I shall consider myself absolved from that promise, and, then, doubt not, I shall be free, for I have powerful friends outside the prison walls who are aware of my situation."

"I trust," said Blanche, "that you will be spared the necessity of calling upon them for aid, but that you will be set at liberty in a legitimate manner, and with the chance before you of beginning life afresh."

"I am deeply grateful for the good feeling which you manifest towards me. I am sorry that I was unable to prevent the consummation of the catastrophe which has plunged you into so much grief."

Blanche wept.

"Adrian Winberry is in the cell next to this," continued Dick. "Yonder stone wall is all that divides us from him. In the cell beyond is the villainous lawyer, Mr. Skinner."

"You seem to know a great deal about the interior of the prison, considering you have been for so short a time an inmate of it."

"My knowledge of it is more extensive than you would perhaps imagine. You will see that in less than twenty-four hours after I receive the intelligence that the judge has tried and failed, I shall be out of Newgate. But, now, I would not go if there was not a single obstacle interposed between me and liberty."

"And why not?"

"You will, perhaps, smile incredulously when I tell you the reason, but it is because I have given my word of honour not to escape, and at all hazards I shall certainly keep it."

These words were spoken in a tone of firm and unalterable decision, and without any boastfulness.

Blanche Winberry could not avoid being much struck with Turpin's manner, and unconsciously she repeated mentally the words which Maud had spoken on the preceding evening, namely, that it was a thousand pities he was a highwayman.

As for Maud, she had stood silently beside Blanche, drinking in every word Dick uttered, and dwelling upon every gesture and change of expression.

"It was then she felt that love was a thing over which the mind had no control.

She loved this highwayman—she felt it—she knew it.

In vain she struggled against the feeling, and endeavoured to dismiss it as unworthy of her—it would come again and again.

And now Dick turned himself to her and spoke.

He wished to ask her a question and elicit a reply, in order that he might once more hear the tones of her voice.

"Lady," he said, "if you will remember when I set out with you to London I left my mare, Black Bess, in your stables; need I tell you that I prize her almost as dearly as I do my own life? I would not part with her for her weight in gold. While I am cooped up here a prisoner, would it be asking you too much to continue to grant her an asylum, and see that she wants for nothing? If you would, I should consider any obligation which you may feel yourself under to me more than repaid—indeed, I should think the obligation was on my side."

"I have already seen to her wants," replied Maud, quietly; "I thought by so doing I should be proving my gratitude for what you have done. I am not mistress at the hall, but yet I think I could take upon myself to promise that your request shall be granted; and that, so long as you wish, a safe asylum for your steed shall be found in the stables, where she shall have every attention. Am I right, Blanche?" she added, turning to her companion, "in promising this much?"

"You are, and I confirm it. I will make it my especial care to see that all her wants are supplied."

"Thanks—thanks!" ejaculated Turpin. "I wish I could say how very much I appreciate and feel this kindness! Now that I know my bonny mare—who has brought me in safety out of a thousand perils—is in safety, I shall care little for my incarceration, and await with patience the progress of events."

"Farewell, then," said Blanche, extending her hand—for the more she saw of the highwayman the more did her feelings change towards him. "Farewell! When next we meet, if we should ever do so, I trust I shall find you a free man."

Dick made no reply to this speech, but raised the hand proffered him respectfully to his lips.

Blanche drew it away with a slightly offended air, which Dick pretended not to notice by making a low bow.

Fain would Blanche have prevented Maud from taking her leave of the highwayman.

But just then it was out of her power to prevent it.

Timidly—with her heart fluttering so violently that she could only catch her breath by short and sudden gasps—with the colour mounting in her fair cheeks, Maud Gouldman held out her hand to Dick in the same manner as Blanche had done, and, making a great effort, articulated the word "farewell."

As before, Dick took the small, fair hand that was held out to him between his own, and with an inclination of the most profound respect, touched the tips of the fingers with his lips.

As he did so, a thrill shot through both with the rapidity of an electric shock.

It as suddenly ceased.

Dick released the hand, but not without a slight pressure, which he could not prevent himself from giving.

Then, with his head still bent down, he murmured in a tone of deep seriousness—

"Farewell."

When he raised his head his visitors were gone.

The cell-door was closed.

Dick sank down upon the chair.

But, starting the moment afterwards to his feet, he paced up and down the cell with rapid strides.

This interview produced a great effect upon him, nor could he prevent its doing so, or banish it from his mind.

By the quick motion up and down the cell, however, he succeeded, after a time, in subduing his agitation.

He was interrupted by the appearance of his jailors, and, though he strove to conceal from them all traces of his emotion, yet they did not fail to perceive that something had taken place which had moved him much.

But, by a forced hilarity, Dick strove to disguise his sadness.

"I have got a piece of news for you, captain," said one, at length, when dinner was over.

"Indeed—what is it?"

"The warrants have arrived."

"Well?"

"The condemned are to suffer on Monday morning."

"All three?"

"Yes. Adrian Winberry, John Norman, and Richard Sare, are all three to be executed at Tyburn on Monday morning."

"But Norman and Sare expected a respite."

"Yes, I think they did, but it has not been granted them. I saw the execution warrants myself."

"To-day is Friday, is it not?"

"Yes."

Dick dropped off into a fit of musing.

Finding themselves unable to arouse him from it, the two jailors left the cell.

And so the day passed away—a long weary day it seemed to Dick. He fancied night would never come.

But if the time appeared to pass slowly to him, there were those to whom it seemed to pass by with lightning-like rapidity.

Those were the three men condemned to death.

They had so few hours to live that they were easily numbered.

Norman and Sare were utterly prostrated.

They had filled themselves with the hope that, after making a confession as they did, the capital sentence would be commuted.

But now that that hope had proved to be utterly fallacious, they had given themselves up to the most abandoned grief.

They wept, they shrieked, they implored for mercy, but to no avail.

With Adrian the case was different.

He knew he had no hope to expect, and, therefore, after the reception of the warrant, his demeanour underwent no alteration.

CHAPTER CCCXIV.

THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN REACH THE WHITE HORSE IN DRURY-LANE, AND TOM KING ANNOUNCES HIS INTENTION OF RETURNING THE COMPLIMENT TO DICK TURPIN, WHEN THE OFFICERS MAKE A SUDDEN ATTACK UPON THE INN.

THE landlord of the public-house at which Tom King and his comrades had learned such important information respecting Dick Turpin, looked after the highwaymen with deep indignation, until a turn in the road hid them from his sight.

"Don't let anything, indeed," he muttered, wrathfully. "I wonder what I could tell, if I was a mind to try?"

In the meantime our friends continued on their way to London.

"What are we to think of this?" said Tom King.

"Dick Turpin in Newgate!"

"I can scarcely believe that such a thing is true."

"Nor I, Claude," rejoined Tom King. "You know how often he said he would never yield himself up a prisoner, but that he would rather die a thousand deaths."

"Oh I yes, he always declared that."

"He did; and yet we are told he is there. Well, it is no good for us to speculate upon it, because we should be sure not to get at the truth. The best thing we can do is to push on for London at full speed, and learn all we can as quickly as possible."

"That is the plan, Tom. But whereabouts shall we go?"

"Why, to old Matthew's in Drury-lane. We are sure to hear tidings of him there."

"Of course we are," said Claude. "I had forgotten all about him."

"You would not have done so if you had known him

as long as I have. He is a real friend, and no mistake."

"Then, let us make our way there at full speed, for, if Dick is in Newgate, why, of course, we must get him out."

"Of course we must; but it is no good our trying to do that until we have learned the full particulars."

"Forward, then. The sooner we reach Drury-lane the better."

This was an opinion in which all three unanimously acquiesced, so they urged their horses forward with all the speed they possibly could.

It was growing dusk when all three pulled up in Vere-street, Lincoln's-inn Fields.

It was Tom King who set the example, and the others immediately followed it.

"I think we had better not go any further on horse-back," he said.

"Why not?"

"We shall attract so much attention, and that is what we ought to avoid, if possible."

"Certainly."

"I propose, then, that we alight here, and give our horses in charge of some one or other."

"What shall we do with them eventually?"

"Why, when we get to old Matthew's, I will tell him, and then he will send some one to fetch them, by which all suspicion will be avoided."

"So it will, that is a capital idea."

The three highwaymen immediately alighted from their steeds.

It was not long before they found a man who was quite willing to take charge of their horses for a little while.

Then, singly and on foot, they made their way up White Horse-yard.

Tom King went first, taking care to reconnoitre.

But he saw nothing suspicious, so, in a bold and confident manner, he crossed the threshold of the old inn.

The place seemed, for a wonder, to be quite void of customers.

Tom knew every part of the building well, so he walked down the passage to the door leading into the bar, which we are sure the reader will remember.

To reach this of course he had to pass the bar window, where the customers were served.

As he stepped swiftly by, he saw old Matthew ensconced in the depths of a huge arm-chair.

Without making any more noise than he could avoid, Tom turned the handle of the door and entered.

Old Matthew was sound asleep.

There was a chair just opposite to where he sat, so Tom silently sank into it, intent on giving the worthy landlord a slight surprise.

Having composed himself to his satisfaction, he took a tobacco-pipe which was standing against the grate, and made one end of it rather warm by putting it between the bars.

Then he touched Matthew upon the back of his hand.

The effect was electrical.

Old Matthew uttered a shout, and opened his eyes.

Then he closed them again, for he thought he must be dreaming.

But upon opening them once more, he saw, still in the same position, Tom King.

Before he could recover from his surprise or utter an ejaculation, another figure glided in.

That was Sixteen-String Jack.

The landlord rose to his feet just as another form entered.

That was Claude Duval.

"Bless my life, gentlemen!" he said, at length, "what can be the meaning of this?"

"Do you know us?"

"Know you? ask me if I know Drury-lane from any other street in London. But you mustn't stop here and be seen. Come in—come in!"

He opened the inner door as he spoke, and ushered the three highwaymen into the private parlour, which no one was allowed to enter without his permission.

He placed seats for all, including himself, and then put a number of bottles and tankards and glasses upon the table, so that they could partake of whatever they thought proper.

"Then, as he deposited himself in a chair, he said—

"Now, pray do not keep me in suspense a moment!"

longer, but tell me, what brings you all three here? Why, do you know I had quite given up all hopes of ever seeing you any more."

"It's a long time since we met, certainly," said Tom King, "but I am very glad we have met once again."

"So am I. Come, now, stand upon no ceremony. When you are here, you are at home. Pour out for yourselves, and drink just as much as ever you like."

"Thanks, Matthew. You are a real good sort, you are, but there is something we want you to do for us at once."

"What is it?"

"Why, we came here on horseback, but we thought if we all three rode up to the door, we should attract a good deal of attention, so we alighted in Vere-street, and got a man there to take charge of the horses until we sent for them."

"And very wise of you. I can tell you, it was a lucky thing for all of us that you had so much thought."

"Why, is there anything particular the matter?"

"No, only lately you would not believe what a close watch the police have kept upon this house. They have rushed in once or twice, but they were not clever enough to find anything."

"I suppose not, Matthew. It strikes me you are more than a match for all the Bow-street officers in London, if you only feel inclined."

"They did not find anything," said the landlord, "because there was nothing."

"Oh! indeed. But come, send for the horses."

"I will at once."

"I suppose you can find room for them?"

"Oh! yes."

"That is all right, then."

Old Matthew left the room for a few minutes, but he quickly returned.

"I have put that matter all right," he said. "I wish I could manage everything as easy. Now, then, tell me what brings you here? Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Well, that would be a long story to tell."

"So much the better."

"We can't stop to tell it."

"But you must."

"I tell you we can't."

"Why not?"

"Because time is too precious for us to waste a moment of it."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Dick Turpin."

"Oh! ah!"

"He is in Newgate."

"So I have heard."

"Is it really true?"

"It is, indeed, I am sorry to say."

"But how did it come about? He always said he would never yield himself a prisoner."

"I know he did."

"But what induced him to alter his mind?"

"I don't know all the particulars, but all I do know you shall very quickly be made acquainted with."

"Go on, then, we are burning to hear it."

"I have a good mind not."

"Why?"

"Because you would not satisfy my curiosity with respect to your adventures."

"You shall have them in full, never fear, but not until you have told us all about Dick."

"I will tell you all I know."

"Do so, then."

Old Matthew then proceeded to give an outline of what had taken place at the trial.

He did not know all the circumstances, but he was pretty well acquainted with all that had taken place at the Old Bailey.

The three highwaymen were filled with admiration when they heard of the noble manner in which Dick Turpin had come forward to give his evidence, and proportionably indignant when they learned the judge had refused to hold out any protection to him, and prevent him being taken prisoner.

They heard of the riot which had ensued with feelings of greater satisfaction.

But that Turpin had been actually locked up in a cell after all, they thought was incredible in the extreme.

Old Matthew, however, took care to inform them of the words which the judge had uttered, and the promise he had made to interest himself on Dick's behalf.

But to this the highwaymen attached less importance than they really ought to have done.

They had no faith in judges being their friends.

"And so Dick is still in Newgate?" he said.

"He is."

"Have you seen him?"

"No."

"Have you tried?"

"Of course I have. I went to the door of the prison as soon as I heard the news, but they would not let me see him. They knew me, and turned me away."

"Oh! indeed!"

"Yes. What could I do?"

"Nothing."

"Just so. But I heard a bit of news which filled me with surprise."

"What is it?"

"Why, the judge succeeded in gammoning Dick into making a promise that he would not attempt to escape."

"Bah!"

"It's a fact. The judge promised in return that he would do all in his power to procure his release—he was so pleased with his conduct at the trial."

"Well, there might be something in that, but I don't like it."

"Nor I."

"Well, then, Matthew, what is to be done?"

"That is just what I want to know."

"Of course we can't let him stay in Newgate?"

"Certainly not."

"Then we must get him out."

"I am afraid that will be a thing very difficult to accomplish."

"It won't be very easy, that's certain."

"No, it won't; and I don't think the judge will do much good, for Dick has balked the authorities so long, and has played such a desperate game with them, that now they have once got him into their clutches, they won't be very willing to let him go again."

"That is precisely my opinion."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Tom King. "Dick is in Newgate, and we must get him out. You don't dispute that, do you?"

"No."

"Very well, then. It is no good for us to attempt to do anything tending that way without establishing a means of communication with him of some sort or other."

"But, how is that to be done?"

"I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you. Do you recollect when I was in Newgate?"

"Yes, very well."

"Dick came to the prison and paid me a visit."

"And nearly got nabbed."

"Never mind, he escaped."

"He did, that's true."

"Well, said he to me, 'you will never have to return the compliment, for I intend to die before ever I am taken prisoner; consequently, I can never become a live tenant of Newgate.'"

"He said that, did he?"

"He did."

"I have heard him speak to the like effect myself."

"Listen. Now it seems I am in a position to return him the compliment, though he never thought I should be."

"But you don't intend to do so?"

"I do; and I have got a capital scheme in my head."

"To see Dick?"

"Yes."

"Then let us hear it at once."

"I intend—"

Tom suddenly ceased.

"What's that?" he asked.

Old Matthew sprang to his feet.

"Quietly," he said. "Don't move or make a noise, it may be nothing after all."

The others followed his example, and rose.

The noise which had interrupted Tom King in what he was about to say, was the trampling of feet and the cries



[DICK TURPIN FRUSTRATES ADRIAN WINBERRY'S ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.]

of voices, and as these sounds continued old Matthew drew a couple of bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

Scarcely had he done so than some heavy blows were struck upon it, and a commanding voice shouted, in a loud tone:

"Open the door, in the king's name!"

Then, without waiting sufficient time to know whether the order would be obeyed, a vigorous attack was made upon the door, which soon began to show signs of giving way before the blows which were rained upon it.

"The officers have made another attack," said old Matthew.

"Confound them! what a nuisance they are."

"What shall we do?"

"I am afraid they know you are here."

"What then?"

"It makes the chance of hiding you all the more difficult."

"I know that, but what shall we do? If you are not quick, they will have the door down."

No 59.—BLACK BESS.

And this looked very likely indeed, for it was giving way in all directions—it never having been intended to withstand such an attack as that which was now made upon it.

"I vote we give them pepper!" said Claude, and, as he spoke, he went to the fire-place, and very deliberately took up the poker.

Armed with this formidable weapon, he made his way to the door.

He reached it at an opportune moment.

CHAPTER CCCXV.

THE POLICE-OFFICERS MAKE AN ATTACK UPON THE HIGHWAYMEN AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN IN DRURY-LANE.

ONE of the officers who were outside had succeeded in partially forcing his way through the door, in spite of the efforts which Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack made to prevent him.

To swing the poker round his head was, to Claude Duval, the work of a second only.

He brought it down with full force upon the shoulder of the officer which was plainly visible between the door and the doorpost.

The man uttered a howl of agony as he felt the weight of the crushing blow which Claude inflicted, and he made a desperate effort to withdraw himself from the dangerous position which he had taken upon himself to occupy.

He was induced to make a second effort ten times more desperate than the first, by another blow which Claude administered with the poker.

This time he succeeded in withdrawing himself, and the door was again closed as well as the dilapidated condition of the fastenings would permit it to be.

But a voice was now heard to cry—

"Fire, my men—fire! Give them one volley through the door, and then follow me, and down with it."

A rattling noise followed this order, which filled our friends with no little dismay.

"Stand aside," cried old Matthew in a low voice, and yet loud enough to be plainly heard by our friends, "stand aside, all, or you will be injured by the bullets."

The caution came just in time, for at that moment there came a loud report of firearms, with which the sound of crushing wood, as the bullets made their way through the door, was mingled.

But when old Matthew spoke it was the easiest matter conceivable to step on one side so as to be out of the range of the shots, and our friends, therefore, escaped without the least injury happening to them.

There could be no doubt, however, about the officers being fully in earnest in what they were about.

And here let us give a word of explanation.

It is ever our wish to avoid mystery. It is not to that which we look for interest, and therefore we do not attempt to preserve it. No circumstance is intentionally left unexplained to the reader.

During the conversation which he had had with the three highwaymen a few minutes before, old Matthew had stated that of late he had been much troubled with the police.

And this was the fact.

Old Wriggles was aware that Matthew was a firm friend to all the family generally, and to light-bodies in particular, and that this was well-known among the classes referred to was quite certain.

That astute, or, as they say now-a-days, intelligent officer, determined to keep close watch upon the "White Horse," and make periodical incursions into it whenever anything of a sufficiently suspicious nature occurred to justify him in doing so.

But hitherto old Matthew had been a match for him.

It might have been that he really had no one concealed on his premises, but whether that was so or not, he put on an appearance of great candour, and placed his house at their disposal for them to search it as they thought proper.

At present, then, no good had been achieved by the officers in these attacks.

But they had had no precise information.

Now the case was different.

Undaunted by the numerous repulses they had met with, and the unsuccess which they had hitherto had, the officers, under the direction of Mr. Wriggles, still maintained their watch.

And what was it they expected to find?

Dick Turpin had been seen in London, and had been captured.

His three inevitable companions, they argued, were somewhere not very far off.

Where so likely a spot to look for them as the "White Horse" Inn, the landlord of which had to their knowledge on more than one occasion signally befriended them?

This was the reason, then, why the watch was kept, and why old Matthew had been so much troubled.

We have now to account for the present attack.

Our friends certainly acted very wisely in coming to a halt in Vere-street, Lincoln's-inn Fields, instead of proceeding on horseback direct to White Horse-yard.

If they had done so, they would inevitably have been captured, for the officers were even then upon the watch.

Luckily, however, this was avoided.

By going on foot as they had, and taking such precautions to reconnoitre, they had entered without being perceived by their enemies.

But our friends had been seen when they alighted from the horses, although they were not aware of that unpleasant fact.

It was an officer who saw them, but, like a prudent man, he affected to take no notice, and when the highwaymen bent their steps towards Drury-lane, he made no attempt to follow them.

He contented himself with keeping a sharp eye on the cattle, the owners of which were not, he was sure, going very far away.

His watching was soon rewarded.

Presently a man came who had been dispatched by old Matthew upon that especial errand to fetch the horses.

Cautiously, then, this officer followed the horses, until he saw them housed in the stables at the rear of the "White Horse."

Then, convinced there was no more to be seen at present, he made his observations known to Mr. Wriggles, who at once resolved upon what he should do.

He would attack the inn so vigorously and rapidly that no chance should be given either for concealment or escape.

He had little or no doubt in his mind that the three daring highwaymen of whom he had so long been in search, and who had given him such a deal of trouble, were at that moment under the roof of the inn.

He sent off then for reinforcements, and surrounded the inn as well as the number of his men would allow him.

Then, placing himself at the head of the remainder, he rushed in.

We have already detailed the commencement of the attack, and described the success he met with.

The position of our friends certainly looked critical in the extreme.

But we have faith in old Matthew, and are not void of the hope that somehow or other he will be able to trick the officers.

At any rate, owing to his timely warning, they escaped all injury from the volley with which Mr. Wriggles thought fit to favour them.

But before the din of the explosion was well out of their ears, he beckoned to the highwaymen to leave the position they then occupied, and follow him across the apartment.

Of course they did this quickly and willingly enough.

At that very moment Mr. Wriggles and his officers dashed vigorously against the door.

Matthew did not speak, but having reached one side of the room, he opened a door, of the existence of which our friends were utterly in ignorance.

And so they would have been if they had been in that room a thousand times oftener than they had.

It was invisible.

We will describe how this was.

The parlour behind the bar of the "White Horse" was papered with a rather gorgeous complicated patterned paper.

There were curious curves and scrolls upon it, and huge bunches of flowers of variegated hues.

In one of the darkest corners of the parlour was the door we speak of.

But there were neither fastenings nor hinges visible. It was covered with the paper, and presented a level unbroken surface with it.

The crevice, too, which one would have thought would have marked the shape of the door, was invisible.

The eye running round it failed to detect anything of the kind.

How was this?

It was simple enough.

The shape of the door had been cut to correspond with the extraordinary pattern of the paper referred to.

If the paper took a capricious curve, the shape of the door followed it.

Then in these curves one portion was shaded very deeply, so that, when the door was closed, it would have taken a sharp eye to have discovered it.

The darkest and obscurest corner had been chosen for it, and the back of the door had been lined with some substance which would have caused the wood to emit

a dull sound like brickwork when struck, so that it would stand the ordeal of the most usual tests applied for the discovery of secret doors, namely, to strike the walls with the butt-end of a pistol, and listen for a hollow sound.

But, as the reader may suppose, the highwaymen did not have much time afforded them to examine this door. A dark recess was disclosed by it.

Old Matthew spoke hurriedly.

"This is the best I can do for you this time. Make haste! Get in there, and I will shut the door."

"But—"

"Never mind. Listen! You will be able to hear all that passes. If you find this hiding-place is in imminent danger of discovery, you must quit it."

"But how?"

"I will tell you as rapidly as possible if you will not interrupt me. At the back of you is a door which you can open easily enough; it leads into the yard. Here you will see another door; that leads you into White Horse-yard. But don't leave this place of concealment without you find it positively necessary."

The three highwaymen instantly gave their promise to comply with the instructions given by the landlord.

No sooner had they done so, and squeezed themselves into the cupboard—for the recess looked more like that than anything else—than old Matthew closed the door, which fastened with a spring.

He had evidently a particular course of action marked out to perform, for he seized the poker which Claude Duval had used to such good advantage, and stood with it in his hand in an attitude of defence.

In the meantime, Mr. Wriggles and his men had made a second rush against the bar door, hinging their bodies against it with all the force they were capable of.

This second rush was effectual, so far as the demolition of the door went, for down it fell and the officers with it.

But springing to their feet, they rushed forward to the attack, when to their surprise, they found there was no one to confront them but old Matthew, the landlord, who, however, held up the poker in a menacing manner, and looked as though he had fully made up his mind to defend himself if attacked.

Panting for breath—his eyes flashing fire—and his usually red face now of a purplish-black hue—Mr. Wriggles, pistol in hand, rushed into the little parlour with his men.

Old Matthew, preserving upon his countenance an expression of perfect calmness, retreated a step or two towards the fire-place as the officers advanced.

That these worthies had fully made up their minds that the persons they sought were in this parlour was fully proved by their looks of disappointment and rage when they saw that old Matthew was the sole inmate of it.

By an effort, Mr. Wriggles commanded his voice and spoke.

But it was in a gasping, jerking sort of way that the words were uttered.

"Wh—what's—the—m—meaning of this?"

"I think I am the proper person to ask that question," said Matthew, coolly, "and you the proper person to reply to it."

"Th—that won't do."

"I shall try, at any rate."

"Do you mean to say you have not had three highwaymen in here, and that you have hidden them somewhere?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who attacked us, then?"

"You attacked me."

"Pho—pho. One of my men has had his shoulder-bone smashed with a blow from a poker."

"And here is the poker," replied old Matthew, still with the same calmness, and holding up the article mentioned as he spoke.

"But where is the man who used it?"

"Here he is,"

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"By what right did you use it?"

"The right which every man has to defend his own house."

"Pho—pho—nonsense. That won't do. You knew we were police."

"No I didn't. You broke in here like thieves, and

without saying a word to anybody, tried to break the door down. Of course, I defended myself. I should not have been a man if I had not. Then you must fire a volley of bullets through the door, and smash it down completely."

"Where are the highwaymen? They are here. I have evidence of that. You have hidden them."

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Officer. You have got a spite against me, that's the long and the short of the matter. But I'll see whether there's any law in the land, or whether there's not. I am a patient, easy-tempered man, or else I shouldn't have put up with this sort of things so long as I have, but I don't intend to put up with it any longer. You have made a dead set at me, but I don't know for what reason. I never did you any harm that I know of, and I don't believe I ever have done you any. But I should just like to know what harm you have done me. You have taken away my character as a respectable publican and you have quite ruined my trade, for who would ever think of going into a house which was continually watched by the police, and where they were liable to be pounced upon at any moment? Why no one, of course, and yet that is just the state of things here."

"Hold your row," said Mr. Wriggles, at length succeeding in stemming the current of the landlord's eloquence. "Hold your row. We don't want none of that gaff. We know our birds are here, and we means to have them."

"Take them, then."

"We shall."

"You'll get yourself into trouble. Here was I sitting quietly in my private room—mark that, if you please—private room—I say, here was I sitting in my private room—"

"Oh! d—n your private room," yelled Wriggles, in a rage. "D—n your private room, and you and all."

"Oh! just as you like, but I say you broke in all at once like a parcel of thieves, so, of course, I stood up and defended myself. And that's the truth of the matter."

"Don't pay any attention to him," cried Wriggles. "Search the house, my men, from top to bottom, and, if he obstructs you, I give you my authority to take him into custody. I will take the responsibility of that upon myself."

CHAPTER CCCXVI.

MR. WRIGGLES FINDS OLD MATTHEW RATHER MORE THAN A MATCH FOR HIM.

FROM their well-contrived place of concealment our friends could hear with perfect distinctness every word uttered, and they could not help feeling mightily amused when they heard old Matthew give vent to his well-acted indignation.

Finding that so far they were menaced with no particular danger, they remained perfectly still, fearful of betraying their hiding-place by making the slightest movement.

But the reader can without doubt imagine to some extent the anxiety which they experienced, and the eagerness with which they listened to what was going forward.

After the order had been given to take him into custody, old Matthew assumed a deeply injured air.

He seated himself in the chair by the fireside, the back of which was turned to the secret door.

Then looking the officers in the face, he said—

"Now, gentlemen, here I am, quite powerless. Be good enough to finish knocking my house to pieces. You have begun it very nicely. There lies one door, burst from its hinges and riddled with bullets. Go on, gentlemen, and knock the house down!"

"If we do," said Wriggles, "you will have no one to blame but yourself."

"How do you make that out?"

"You know how I make it out, without asking me."

"No, I don't."

"You do, I say."

"Tell me how I am to blame for you knocking my house to pieces and ruining my trade. Just answer me that."

"Why, as everybody knows, your house is the most notorious resort for highwaymen and 'family' men of all descriptions in all London."

"Who says so?"

"I say it."

"I know you do."

"That is enough, then."

"No, it isn't."

"What more do you want?"

"Prove it."

"Prove it?"

"Yes, prove it, Mr. Wiggles. What authority have you for making such a statement? Have you ever found any highwaymen or 'family' men in my house? Just answer me that."

And as he spoke, the landlord stamped his foot upon the hearth, and in the act caused the arm-chair in which he was sitting to run back upon its castors until the back touched that part of the parlour wall where the secret door was placed.

He thought he was putting at least one more barrier between our friends and the officers.

Mr. Wiggles evidently did not see anything suspicious in the movement, for he went on in reply to old Matthew Gale's remarks.

"You have always been one too many for us, Mr. Gale. I know we have never found any one we wanted in your house, but that is only owing to your superior cunning. But we have seen people who were wanted enter your house, and never come out again."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"Nonsense?"

"Yes. There isn't one of the whole 'family' in London who does not know how sharp a watch is kept upon this place by your police, and do you think they are such fools as to enter it?"

"Well, let that be as it will, I have the clearest proof that three well-known highwaymen, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, entered this public-house not half-an-hour ago. Now I know very well they have not left it, because the inn is well surrounded. Consequently they must be here."

"Find them, then."

"I daresay you think you can defy us to do that without feeling uneasy. Come, landlord, don't be a fool. You know the men we want, and you know they are here; and, what's more, you know a good reward is offered for their apprehension. Now, I'll make you an offer."

"What is it?"

"I know the men are here."

Matthew shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem to have got that idea pretty firmly fixed in your head."

"I have. Very well, then; produce those men. Give them up to me, and I will guarantee that you shan't get into any trouble through their being found in your house; and, what's more, you shall share the reward upon the same terms as the rest."

Matthew heaved a deep sigh.

"I wish I could," he said, "that's all. But the thing's impossible. If they were here, however, I would give them up in a moment upon such advantageous terms being offered me."

And this was said with an air of so much apparent sincerity, that the officer would have been completely deceived by it if he had not known old Matthew as well as he did.

But Mr. Wiggles was not deceived.

He merely put his finger in a waggish manner by the side of his nose, and looked as cunning as he possibly could.

"Won't do," he said, "won't do. Now, Matthew, do, for your own sake, think over the offer I have made you. I know the men I want are in this house, although you have denied it before so many witnesses. Now I will find them, if I have to pull the 'White Horse' down brick by brick, and when I do find them, why, of course, I need not tell you you will be placed in a very awkward position indeed."

There was no one better aware of this fact than old Matthew himself, but still that did not have the least influence upon him.

He would not have betrayed our friends, even if his life was at stake.

But he spoke to the officer.

"Mr. Wiggles," he said.

"What? Have you thought better of it?"

"Better of what?"

"You know of what. Do you agree to accept my offer?"

"I tell you, I only wish I could, but I desire you will listen to me for a moment, and I will tell you something that will benefit you."

"What is it? You see I am in no hurry, because my precautions are so well taken that a mouse could not get out of this place without being seen by some one."

"Very well. Such being the case, take it easy."

"What were you about to say?"

"Oh! I forgot. You have been kind enough to picture what would be the consequences to me if those you seek are found concealed on my premises."

"Yes."

"Well, you say you have seen them enter, and use that as an excuse for having acted in the way you have. Now, if you fail to find them, or make good your accusation, you shall suffer for it if it costs me all my savings to make you. I am tired of this sort of thing, and am resolved to have an end put to it."

"Very well — very well," said Mr. Wiggles, in a cracked tone of voice, and with an uneasy sensation about his heart. "We have wasted time enough, my men. Now, then, to business. Search this apartment thoroughly. Don't leave a corner unexamined, and we will serve all the house just the same."

"You are quite at liberty to do so, gentlemen," said old Matthew; "only I warn you, Mr. Wiggles, of what will be the consequences of your failing in your object."

"I'll chance that. Now, my men. About it."

The police-officers dispersed themselves about the parlour, and peeped under the different articles of furniture, without, of course, discovering anything.

At length they were satisfied they had pried into every corner.

During the search old Matthew preserved his equanimity in a most admirable manner.

He had retained his seat in the arm-chair, never offering to move an inch, and narrowly watching every movement of the officers.

In the position he occupied, he certainly was of great service to our friends, for it prevented that part of the room from undergoing so close an examination as the rest.

And, so well did he perform his part, that no suspicion generated from his actions.

When the men had finished their search, Mr. Wiggles gave an ironical smile, and said—

"I have not quite done yet, Matthew, my friend. I'll show you something else."

As he spoke he took from his coat pocket a small hammer.

It was entirely made of iron—handle, head, and all. The handle was very thin, and the head of a circular shape on one side, and elongating into a spike on the other.

"There's a pretty little tool," he said, affecting to eye it with admiration. "It's really beautiful, that it is."

"What is it for?" asked old Matthew, who could have given a tolerably good guess.

"Why, my friend, I think you may have heard of such things as secret doors in the walls of rooms."

"I have, before now."

"Well, this little instrument is especially intended to discover them."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see it is nicely balanced upon a slender handle. That is for the convenience of the person making use of it. Then look at the head. On one side it's rounded. That's to knock the wall with. If a dull sound is produced, it's all right—you know there's nothing but a wall. If hollow, a door."

"That's all very well," said Matthew, "but the butt-end of a pistol would have answered the purpose just as well."

"Oh! no, it wouldn't. Sometimes you feel rather doubtful as to whether the sound is dull, like a wall, or hollow, like a door. When that is the case you can easily satisfy yourself. To do that, you must bring the sniky part into requisition."

"Very interesting!" said old Matthew, who, although he preserved his coolness, looked upon the instrument with which Wiggles seemed to be so pleased, with distrust and uneasiness.

He did not know the exact extent of his powers. Having given this explanation, Mr. Wiggles set about his task of sounding the walls.

He did this with great care, not leaving a single square foot of the wall without a blow, using for this purpose the blunt or rounded end of the hammer's head.

While he was thus engaged old Matthew was struck with a fresh thought.

So excellent a one was it that he felt he could fairly rub his hands together for very glee.

But he did not venture upon so great a demonstration of satisfaction as that.

But he could not prevent his eye from sparkling.

Hitherto he had looked upon Mr. Wiggles' operations with an indifferent air.

Now, however, he affected to cast uneasy glances upon the walls, and more especially upon the corner of the fire-place on the side of the room opposite to that upon which he sat.

It was not long before this was noticed.

Mr. Wiggles was the first to perceive it.

But though he noticed the spot to which the landlord's eyes were continually and uneasily turned, he took no notice further than to get to that part of the room as quickly as he could.

At length he reached it.

Cautiously and gently he rapped with his hammer.

As he approached, which he did in what he considered an artful manner, he looked at old Matthew out of the corners of his eyes, and observed the changes in his countenance as he neared the important spot.

Full of exultation, and doubting not that he had the game entirely in his hands, Mr. Wiggles tapped away at the wall.

But he ought to have known old Matthew better by this time.

The fact was, the officer was blind just at that moment to everything else but his own superior cunning.

Tap—tap—tap.

As yet the walls had returned a uniformly dull sound, and Wiggles knew that up to the present moment he had struck upon nothing but brick.

Now, however, he struck another blow, and this time the sound which followed was of a decidedly different character.

To use a common simile, it sounded as hollow as a drum.

Old Matthew gave a great start, and pretended to clutch the arms of the chair for support, as though the discovery had come.

He did this because he saw Mr. Wiggles was peeping at him.

"Ha! ha!" laughed that individual, his exultation taking quite a facetious form. "Ha! ha! Mr. Landlord; there's something here. Ha! ha!"

Old Matthew opened and shut his mouth several times in a gasping manner, as though he wanted to speak and could not.

"What's this, I wonder?" continued Mr. Wiggles. "That gives a decidedly hollow sound. Ha! ha! I must call in the assistance of my spiky friend to prove that. Ha! ha!"

As he spoke he turned the handle of the hammer in his hand.

Then he prepared to strike a blow with the spike.

Old Matthew fell back in the chair.

Mr. Wiggles poised the hammer in the air, but paused before he gave the stroke.

He was like a cat which feels secure of its prey, and thinks it a piece of excellent amusement to play with it for a while.

And so it was with the police-officer.

When he thought that he had tormented the landlord enough he struck the blow.

There was a crashing sound.

The spike upon the head of the hammer buried itself in the wood.

"Ha! ha! Mr. Gale! you'll alter your note now, I rather think. You are a very clever man—a very clever man indeed; but, dear me! not near so clever as some one else I know. The secret's out now. But come, I'll be generous with you, old chap; give them up, and you shall hear no more about it, and have your share of the reward."

Old Matthew knew by this time that he had quite hooked his fish.

The bait, so cunningly held out, was swallowed.

A great change took place in his manner.

He assumed a defiant, off-hand way of speaking, and laughed at what Wiggles could do, and defied him to do his worst.

And this so cleverly that the men thought the behaviour only put on—like that kind of courage which fails to make itself apparent until the animal is forced to bay.

"There's nothing," he cried, hoarsely, "there's nothing there. Come away, I say. I tell you there is nothing there."

"Ha! ha!" was the reply made by Mr. Wiggles. "We shall soon see about that. Take care of him, my men, and be prepared for action. I will knock the door down myself, and then you be prepared to grapple with the highwaymen as soon as they make their appearance. Hurrah! my boys, we have them! The reward is ours!"

CHAPTER CCCXVII.

CONTINUES TO RELATE THE INTERESTING PROCEEDINGS OF MR. WIGGLES AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN.

MR. WIGGLES was not more sure of his own existence than he was that he had really hit upon the place where the highwaymen were concealed.

He had achieved his end at last.

The hollow reverberating sound which had followed the blows with the blunt end of the hammer, proved that there was a recess.

Then the blow with the sharp end had quite set the matter at rest, as well as shown that there was a concealed door.

And what could be behind that door but the highwaymen?

Then he considered old Matthew's behaviour as an additional assurance.

But the cleverest people are sometimes over-matched, and those who pitted themselves against the landlord of the "White Horse" generally came off worst in the encounter.

Mr. Wiggles did in this instance.

He took a pistol from his pocket, and, cocking it, took up a position in front of the door, and at a few paces from it.

He commanded his men to do the same, and with faces full of the expectation of anticipated triumph, they obeyed.

Old Matthew pretended to be quite overcome.

And now Mr. Wiggles proceeded to "draw the badger," for by this term he designated what he was about to do.

His first proceeding was to knock three times upon the hidden door.

Then he said, in a loud, pompous voice—

"Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack, we, officers of police, know you to be concealed behind this door, and, in the name of his most gracious majesty the king, we call upon you to surrender yourselves to us. If you refuse, the consequences will be upon your own heads. We shall call upon you three times, and if, when we have done so, you do not deliver yourselves into our hands, we shall attack you."

Of course, for the very best of all reasons, there came no response to this speech from behind the door.

Although, in their hiding-place, the three highwaymen could not see what was taking place in the parlour, yet they were well aware the officers were upon the wrong scent, so they did not trouble themselves in the least.

"Once!" cried Mr. Wiggles; "we call upon you to surrender."

A pause.

No reply.

"Twice!"

The same result.

"Three times! we call upon you to surrender."

But no more notice was taken than there had been upon the two preceding occasions.

There was silence still.

Mr. Wiggles began to grow angry at this contumacy. At the same time he could not conceal from himself that a disagreeable presentiment was stealing over him that he was doomed to be "done" in some way.

"Fire!" he cried, in a husky tone of voice. "Fire, every one of you, since they will have it."

The men had nothing to do but to obey orders, besides, their chief set them the example of firing first.

The report of so many pistols in so confined a space was rather stunning and tremendous.

The concussion of the air broke several of the window-panes, and the glass fell with a clattering sound into the yard outside.

The parlour, too, was filled with blue smoke, which was some seconds in clearing away.

When it did so, a glimpse of the spot at which their shots had been aimed could be obtained.

A number of holes were visible, and in many places splinters of wood could be seen.

But no cry as of anguish from a wound reached their ears, nor nothing which could be construed into a death scream.

The uncomfortable feeling which we have described Mr. Wiggles as experiencing increased in intensity.

But, calling to his men to draw their outlasses, he sprang forward with his own in his grasp, and commenced slashing away at the woodwork.

By the united exertions of the police the door was soon pulled down, and then a dark-looking recess was disclosed.

But it was empty.

A glance assured them of that fact.

But Mr. Wiggles, dreading the worst, as he had begun to do, could scarcely bring himself to believe that such a horrible state of things could be real, and that, after all his cunning, his exultation and his trouble had been thrown away.

Cutlass in hand, he dashed into the little recess.

It was about four feet in depth only, and the width of an ordinary door.

He minutely examined the walls, the floor, and the ceiling, but without any good result.

He was forced at last to come to the conclusion that there was no means of outlet to this place, save the legitimate one.

Turning round, with his heart swelling almost to bursting with furious passion, his eye fell upon old Matthew, the landlord.

One glance at that individual's countenance almost maddened him.

He was laughing—yes, positively laughing at and enjoying his discomfiture.

And yet he seemed to be stifling his mirth, for he inflated his cheeks, and then drew them in again, while the shaking of his fat sides communicated a movement to the chair upon which he was sitting.

It was really too bad of old Matthew to so exasperate a discomfited foe.

But he did it.

He felt that it was his turn to rejoice.

"What do you mean, you hoary-headed old villain?" said Mr. Wiggles, striding up to him, his rage quite overcoming his prudence. "What do you mean by this?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Look out that you don't suffer for it."

"Mr. Wiggles!"

"Curses!"

"Mr. Wiggles, I can't help laughing, indeed I can't."

"What have you got to laugh at?"

"Why, you, to be sure."

"Me?"

"Yes, to think what a jolly fool you have made of yourself."

"You mean what a jolly fool you have made of me."

"Oh! I have it that way if you like, only my modesty would not allow me to put it so."

"Oh! I don't your modesty!"

"Very well. Just as you like. But I can't help laughing. Now didn't I tell you as plain as ever I could speak that there was no one there?"

"You said so, but it was not likely I was going to believe you."

"So it seems."

"But you have not conquered me yet, Mr. Gale."

"Oh! you are going to give yourself more trouble, than?"

"I am. The failures I have met with do not daunt

me in the least. On the contrary, they do but serve to increase my vigour and determination."

"Very well, search away, but if you will take my advice you will just go quietly about your business."

"Bah!"

"I know very well you will not be advised by me. If you had, you wouldn't have made that great hole in the wall there."

"The very fact of your having such a place in your parlour wall is suspicious."

"Oh! is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"But suppose I didn't know it was there?"

"No one would ever suppose such a ridiculous thing."

"Oh! wouldn't they. Well now, do you know what that place is that you are making such a grand fuss about?"

"Yes, I do."

"What is it, then?"

"A hiding-place for gentlemen who are wanted."

"Now, don't get such foolish ideas in your head."

"Foolish ideas?"

"Yes, foolish ideas. For that place is nothing more and nothing less than a cupboard which used to be there when I first took the house, but as I had no use for it and considered it spoilt the look of that side of the room, I had the door nailed up and papered over as you see, and so it has remained to this day."

"Then why couldn't you tell us so?"

"Why, you wouldn't have believed me any more than you did a moment ago, when I told you the highwaymen were not here."

"But they were watched in, and their horses are at this very moment in your stable."

"Ah! it's no use talking to you, I am sure. Go on—go on. But if you don't find them I can tell you they will have to suffer for it."

"I will run the risk of that."

"Very well. You are free to act just as you think proper."

"Of course I am."

"Go on, then."

"I will pull this house down, I tell you, and examine every brick one by one, but what I will find them."

Matthew waved his hand, and was about to speak.

But the words he had almost begun to utter, died away upon his lips.

His cheek blanched.

A sound had come upon his ears and also upon the ears of Wiggles and the officers.

They started, and, with cries of rage upon their lips, darted out into the bar.

The sounds which they had heard were those of evident conflict.

The idea that struck them all was that the highwaymen were making their escape from some part of the premises, or, at all events, were trying to do so.

Old Matthew guessed, perhaps, just exactly what had occurred.

But we will properly relate to the reader what had taken place.

To do so we must direct attention to the place where our friends were hidden.

We know that up to a certain time they had remained here in perfect safety, until, indeed, after Mr. Wiggles's attack upon the door.

It will be recollected that when old Matthew left our friends, he gave them some parting instructions, to which he requested their particular attention.

They were to be acted upon in case they should be threatened with discovery, and related to the means which they were to adopt in order to make their escape.

At present there seemed to be no probability of their being put into requisition.

The space, however, in which they had to stand was a limited one, and they experienced considerable inconvenience; yet they did not dare to stir, for fear their movements should be heard by the officers, and their hiding-place betrayed.

But when they heard them preparing to fire a volley at the door on the opposite side of the apartment, they considered that a favourable opportunity to endeavour to make some change in their position.

They did slightly succeed, but only slightly.

They were more comfortable than they were before, but not much.

Then came the little altercation between Matthew and Mr. Wriggles.

During this, Claude, who could not gain anything like a comfortable position, moved gradually and silently until his back was against the wall, opposite to the door by which they had entered.

Against this he rested, when, to his unutterable dismay, he felt it give way behind him.

But he recovered himself quickly enough from falling to the ground, which he had a narrow escape of doing. He saved himself.

The fact was, he had leaned up against the door of which Matthew had spoken, and which, he said, would take them out into the little yard at the rear of the public-house.

Whether the door was secured by a spring and Claude had accidentally pressed upon it, or whether it had not been securely fastened, is hard to say; but, certain it is, from one or other of these causes the door gave way in the manner we have described.

This was a most unlooked-for and dangerous occurrence, for no sooner was the door open than some one called out as though to give the alarm.

This some one was a police-officer, who had been stationed in that identical back yard by his strategic chief in order to keep watch.

Claude guessed this, and the peril of their situation made him more than usually rapid in his actions.

With the swiftness of a tiger's leap, he sprang out through the unexpected aperture into the yard.

There he saw an officer.

To spring upon him and clutch him by the throat with no friendly grip, was the work of a moment.

But the officer was a tall and stalwart man, and Claude could tell that, strong as he was, he had opposed himself to one who was almost his equal.

But putting forth his utmost strength he grappled with this man.

It was but for a moment he had to sustain the conflict single-handed.

His two companions feeling certain that, after what had occurred, their hiding-place would be no further good to them, emerged into the yard, closed the door after them, and hastened to Claude's assistance.

Against such odds, of course the officer did not stand the ghost of a chance.

Sixteen-String Jack, watching his opportunity, clenched his fist and struck him a heavy blow on the side of his head.

But, of course, all this had not been done without making a noise.

It was these sounds of conflict which had reached the ears of old Matthew and Mr. Wriggles in the bar, and which had caused such a tint of deadly paleness to overspread the countenance of the worthy landlord.

It was this struggle which had caused the police-officer and his men to give vent to the cries of rage they did, and to rush out into the bar.

They knew of no other means by which they could reach the yard.

No sooner had they disappeared than old Matthew sprang to his feet.

He looked anxious and disconcerted.

But quick as thought he moved his chair, and, pressing the spring, caused the secret door to fly open.

He passed through it, and closed it after him in a moment.

Then he saw the door opposite to him, which led into the yard, was open.

Two steps took him to the threshold of it.

He could then see into the yard.

The officer who had uttered the alarm lay on the ground without motion.

His companions and Mr. Wriggles had not yet arrived.

But doubtless they would be there in another moment.

Anxiously old Matthew glanced round the yard in search of our friends, for even now he had not lost all hope of saving them.

CHAPTER CCCXVIII.

RETURNS TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE, AND GIVES SOME INTERESTING PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE PROCEEDINGS OF ADRIAN WINBERRY.

ALBEIT we leave Dick Turpin's three brave companions in so perilous a situation, the exigencies of our narrative compel us to revert to the proceedings of Dick Turpin himself.

It will be seen that our hero's stay in the great city prison was destined to be marked by the occurrence of some very remarkable events.

It will doubtless be remembered that when we saw Dick last was on the Friday.

That Friday which preceded the Monday fixed for the execution of Adrian Winberry and his two companions in guilt.

The jailers who were upon such friendly terms with Dick, had informed him of the arrival of the warrants ordering their execution.

The interview which Turpin had with Maud Gouldman and Blanche Winberry produced a great effect upon him.

He tried to shake off the feeling, but found the effort quite a vain one.

He longed for night to come, and yet when darkness descended upon the earth, and the different objects in his cell were shrouded from his view, he felt no better off than before, and, with the same impatient restlessness, longed for day to come again.

But time lagged.

The hours passed by slowly and wearisomely, and Dick Turpin, like Richard III., felt his stern impatience.

Chide this tardy-gaited night,

That, like a foul and ugly witch, doth limp
So tediously away.

But what a contrast there was between him and Adrian's two accomplices, Norman and Sare.

Horrible thought to such souls as theirs—they knew they had but so many hours to live.

So many? Say rather how few, for they were able to count them easily.

To them the minutes flew by with lightning-like rapidity.

The day was gone, and as the last rays of daylight faded from the cell, they felt that they would only twice more see that spectacle.

Oh! it was horrible to feel as they felt. The mind is unable to form a proper estimate of their sensations.

Hour after hour slipped by so swiftly that they seemed like minutes.

At that awful hour they repented, when it was too late, that they had been weak enough to allow themselves to be persuaded by the inducements and arguments which Adrian Winberry held out to them.

How gladly would they have recalled the past.

And so, in fruitless groans and shrieks for mercy, which the stone walls of their cell heeded not, they passed away the night.

They did not dare to sleep, for they dreaded the elapsion of time during unconsciousness. Miserable though they were, they wished to live as long as possible.

And now let us take a glance at Adrian Winberry.

From the time of his condemnation he had unvaryingly preserved a dogged stoicism of manner.

It had completely fixed the idea in the minds of all the officials by whom he was visited, that he had given himself up to despair.

But such was not the fact.

From what the reader has casually seen of Adrian Winberry, he can easily believe that he was not the kind of man to allow himself to be daunted by whatever obstacles might obstruct his path.

Neither was he the kind of man to tamely submit to circumstances without making an effort to turn the current of them.

From the very first moment of his incarceration one word and one idea had been unceasingly uppermost in his mind, and before his mental vision.

And that was escape.

He had resolved to free himself from his confinement. Hitherto, however, he had not been able to make even an attempt.

Now time pressed, and he felt that if he was to escape at all it must be without further loss of time.

On this Friday night, then, to which we adverted, he determined that a trial should be made.

With an eagerness which equalled that of Dick Turpin, he waited and watched for the night to come.

The jailers made their accustomed rounds, and found him in his usual position—that is to say, crouched up like a wild beast.

He vouchsafed not a word to them when they placed his food upon the floor of the cell, but only glared at them with his haggard eyes.

But as soon as they closed the door his demeanour underwent a remarkable alteration.

Springing to his feet, he seized upon the loaf of bread, and, coarse and repulsive as the fare was, began to devour it eagerly.

He did this, not because he was particularly hungry, but because he did not know how long a time would elapse before he had the chance of tasting food again. And, moreover, he wished to endow himself with as much vigour as possible, so as to be the better able to prosecute his escape.

He did not cease till the whole of the loaf had disappeared.

By this time night had fully come.

The faint, roaring hum which had reached his cell, telling him of the busy world without, came no longer to his ears.

Nothing could be heard stirring within the prison.

"It is time," he said, and as he spoke he rose to his feet and paced the cell.

It is probable at that moment he was elaborating some plan of escape which he had engendered in his scheming brain.

At length he paused, and groped his way upon his hands and feet towards the spot where the jailer had deposited the water.

It was a large, strong, stone pitcher.

Raising this to his lips, Adrian drank deeply of its contents, though the quality of the water was not of the purest kind.

He drank again and again at frequent intervals, and then, turning the pitcher over, he allowed the remainder of the water to flow away.

What was he about to do?

In what way was he to accomplish his escape?

We shall see.

The reader must bear in mind we have not mentioned that Adrian Winberry was supplied with any tools.

Nor was he.

But, by noting his actions, we shall see what steps he took to remedy that deficiency.

Having drank his fill, and having, as he imagined satisfied his thirst for a long time to come, he poured away the water.

As soon as the pitcher was empty, he raised it in his hands as high above his head as he could.

Then dashed it down with considerable force on to the floor of the dungeon.

The crash sounded with alarming loudness in the silence of the night.

But no notice appeared to have been taken of it.

He listened, however, for several seconds, and then, hearing no sound indicative of an alarm having been given, or of the approach of anyone, he stooped down.

The pitcher had been broken into several large fragments, which lay scattered about the floor of the cell.

One by one, and with extraordinary patience, he collected them together.

Then he felt them—for he had no light and could not see—and selected from among the rest one piece, which he calculated would best answer the use to which he was about to put it.

This much done, he rose to his feet and looked about for the little grated aperture through which light was admitted to his cell.

He was easily able to fix his eyes upon this, because it was somewhat lighter than the rest of the walls.

By this simple means he was able to exactly and correctly ascertain his precise whereabouts.

With a steady step, as though he had fully resolved upon what he was about to do, he turned to the left, and walked until his further progress was stopped by the stone wall.

It was not, however, as some would have thought, the

stone wall leading into the passage before which he paused, but the one dividing his dungeon from the one next to it.

Was it his intention to first make his way into that?

If so, for what purpose?

He had learned that his lawyer, Josiah Skinner, was in the cell adjoining his, and his resolve was to work his way into that and obtain the co-operation of his legal adviser, who, perhaps, would be provided with tools, which would make the task of escape lighter.

But, if he had not, he considered he should still have the advantage which the assistance of Mr. Skinner would give him.

There was another motive, too, which induced him to adopt this line of conduct.

The cell in which he stood, and which had been chosen for his reception, was doubtless one of the strongest in the prison, so that it would be a matter of great difficulty, if not impossibility, for him to make his way out of it.

But with the cell in which the lawyer was confined the case might be different.

The same precautions for strength might not have been taken.

At any rate, if the cell was just the same, it could not be more difficult to escape from, and he would have the certain advantage which assistance would give him.

And so, for these reasons, instead of making his attack on the wall which divided his cell from the passage, he made it upon the one that separated his from the one in which he believed Mr. Skinner was confined.

As yet that worthy was only in custody on the charge of perjury which the judge had preferred against him, and therefore no great strictness would be exercised towards him.

Pausing, then, before this wall, Adrian Winberry carefully felt it with his hands.

He passed them over the huge block of stone of which it was composed, until the ends of his fingers came in contact with the mortar which cemented them together.

He ran his fingers along the crevice or indentation between two blocks of stone.

Then, satisfied apparently with the result of his labours, he knelt down on the floor of the dungeon, and, with the piece of the stone pitcher he had selected from the rest, began to pick out the mortar in small fragments.

For this the piece of pitcher was admirably adapted, for it had a sharp point, which dug into the somewhat moist mortar easily and gradually removed it.

But still the task of dislodging a huge piece of stone by such means would never have been undertaken save by a prisoner, and that prisoner animated by the hope that each tiny grain that he picked out took him so much nearer to freedom.

It was in this light that Adrian Winberry looked upon his superhuman task.

It was this thought which encouraged him to continue his exertions and endowed him with the requisite amount of patience.

He put forth his whole energies, and it was really wonderful to see what a quantity of mortar he removed, and how soon he had worked his way all round the stone.

And now, as he proceeded, he found the difficulty of what he was about increase.

So much so that, looking back, and judging by what he had to do, the first portion of his laborious work looked like insignificant child-play.

The deeper he worked his way into the interstices of the stones, the more trouble he had to introduce the piece of pitcher and dislodge the mortar.

But he persevered, never allowing his courage to abate for a moment—never suffering his mind to experience the least sensation of depression.

Presently a curse broke from his lips.

In using the piece of pitcher which had done him such good service rather roughly, it had broken in his hand, leaving a portion sticking in the wall.

This compelled him to pause, and when he did so he found how much his exertion had heated him.

The perspiration poured off him in streams.

With a hasty movement he brushed away the clustering drops from about his face, and, having done so, groined his way to where he had left the other fragments of the pitcher, and began to search among them for another piece which would perform the duty he required of it.



[TOM KING IS DETECTED IN HIS DISGUISE.]

At length he found two, and, in the anticipation of meeting with another accident, took them both and renewed his operations.

The piece of pitcher sticking in the crevice was removed.

Time passed, and still Adrian was at his work—for two hours he never rested once, except for the purpose we have mentioned, but kept on untiringly.

At the expiration of that time, however, he paused, but only because his task was so far accomplished.

He had worked all round the four sides of one of the huge blocks of stone, until the crevice he had made was so deep that the piece of pitcher was not long enough to reach the mortar.

Surely now, he thought, he should be able to loosen the stone in its setting somewhat, so he rose and, putting his fingers as far as he could in the top crevice, exerted all his strength and pressed downwards.

To his great joy, the mass gave way beneath the pressure, slowly and gradually.

But he stopped and placed the piece of pitcher in the under crevice, so that it should not sink so far that he should be unable to raise it again.

This precaution was one very necessary to take.

In this way, then, and with incredible patience, he worked the block of stone up and down—backwards and forwards—until he had loosened it in a surprising degree.

The services of the pitcher were then again called into requisition, and, taking the strongest fragment he could find, he used it like a lever, and, by slow degrees, worked the stone out into his cell.

This was a very tedious operation, but, when the stone projected about half an inch, he seized it with his fingers, and strove to pull it towards him.

He broke his nails and bruised his fingers in the attempt, but he did not care for such minor inconveniences as these, and, at last, to his inexpressible gratification the block of stone lay upon the floor of the dungeon.

CHAPTER CCCXIX.

ADRIAN WINBERRY MAKES A FATAL ERROR, AND DICK TURPIN FRUSTRATES HIS ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

To Adrian Winberry this seemed a good deal done towards the accomplishment of his purpose, and he felt inspired with hope accordingly; but anyone looking at it as a partial escape from the prison at Newgate, and taking into account what would have to be done before freedom was attained, would be apt to consider the displacing of that stone as a very trifling thing indeed.

But flushed with the success which had hitherto attended upon him, the prisoner, without allowing himself more than a moment's rest, returned to his work with undiminished vigour.

It was now that he felt how welcome a draught of the water he had thrown away would have been to have cooled his parched lips and burning throat; but he consoled himself with the thought that ere long he should stand within the dungeon occupied by the rascally attorney, where, beyond doubt, he would be able to slake his thirst with abundance of water—for, he argued, Mr. Skinner would have had no motive to pour his away.

A large square aperture was now presented in the wall where the stone had been taken away, and thrusting his head and shoulders into this, Adrian, by the aid of his sense of touch, commenced a careful exploration of it.

The flakes of mortar crumbled away beneath his fingers, until he could again feel the crevice round another stone.

Undaunted by the awkward position he would have to assume in order to set to work again, Adrian took up the piece of pithor, and resolutely picked away at the mortar.

He had the satisfaction of finding that he made very rapid progress, for in the middle of the wall where he was now at work the mortar was quite moist, and consequently easily removed.

Still it was a weary time, and his arms ached insufferably before he was able to work that stone up and down as he did the other.

But at last that time came, and, feverishly impatient, he loosened it in its setting.

Then the next thing was to remove the stone.

He did not attempt to draw it towards him this time. On the contrary, as he judged that stone was all that divided him from the contiguous dungeon, the easiest and best method by far would be to push it from him.

And accordingly he applied the pressure in that direction.

At first without result, but presently he felt it gradually slipping before him.

Encouraged, he pushed harder and harder, until, with an ominous crash, the huge stone fell into the next dungeon.

To writhes through the aperture was, to Adrian Winberry, the work of a moment, but when he did so and regained his feet, he met with a surprise that he was little prepared for, and he uttered a shout either of anger or of fear.

The next moment he felt himself tightly clutched round the throat by some one.

But in order to make things quite clear, we will just for a moment revert to the doings of Dick Turpin upon that eventful night.

After all his longings for the time to pass away, the night had come, but without bringing any relief to his vexed spirit.

He paced up and down the narrow limits of his cell with an impatient tread, till, tiring of the exercise, he flung himself upon the rude couch which did duty for a bed.

But though he thus sought for repose, sleep did not come to him—indeed, he never remembered being so very wide awake as he then was.

The silence and the darkness at last, however, had the desired effect upon him, and towards the time when Adrian Winberry commenced his operations, Dick fell into a restless and uneasy slumber.

In this state he continued for a long while, until, in fact, Adrian had dislodged his first stone.

Just then Turpin sat "up on the bed and strove to look about him.

But he could see nothing save the darkness and the light square patch in the wall where the window was situated.

He had awoke with some faint, peculiar sound in his ears, but what it was he was at a loss to think.

Now, however, all was profoundly still!

Under the impression that his fancy had misled him, and that his awakening was due to an awkward position, or some such trivial circumstance, he proceeded to lie down again.

But almost immediately he heard a faint scratching sound.

Had it not been for the intense silence which prevailed within the cell, it would have been inaudible.

Dick heard it, however, and he lay quite still and listened with the utmost intentness.

Convinced that his imagination was playing him no trick, he gradually and quietly rose.

Then slipping off the bed, he stood upon his feet on the floor of the cell, and turned himself round until he was quite sure his face was turned in the direction from which the noise proceeded.

This much done, he crept stealthily forward, until his further progress was arrested by the wall.

The scratching was on the other side of it, for a certainty.

Now this was a sound which Dick could not altogether make out the cause of.

The sound seemed to come from what he had been told was Adrian Winberry's cell, but that that individual should be working his way into his cell he conceived was too absurd a supposition to be indulged in for a moment. And yet, as the reader is aware, such was actually the case.

But then Adrian Winberry was labouring under a mistake.

He had the idea implanted in his mind that he was working his way into the company of his associate.

But he was in some way wrong in his information as to the side of the cell upon which Mr. Skinner's abode was situated.

And instead of getting nearer to his friend, or progressing in his escape, he was in reality labouring so hard to get into the presence of one who had by his actions proved himself to be his greatest enemy, and if it had not been for whom he would, in all probability, have completely succeeded in his nefarious undertakings.

Dick Turpin, as we say, could scarcely bring himself to believe that the sounds he heard were produced by Adrian Winberry, because he was at a loss to think what motive he could have for making his way into his presence.

It seemed altogether preposterous, and yet he could not help the idea occurring again and again to him, because he could not think what else it could be.

Puzzled and perplexed, Dick made his way to the chair, and sat down upon it.

"I suppose," he said, "I can do nothing better than await the progress of events. It's a very extraordinary circumstance—very, indeed. I can't think it's Adrian Winberry. Perhaps it is some friend of mine, who thinks by getting into my cell to enable me to make my escape. I shall be sorry if such proves to be the case, because, as I have given my promise, I could not avail myself of his services, and, upon the discovery being made, my position would become worse instead of better."

This was unquestionably true, because the authorities would be put more upon their guard, and their prisoner would be hemmed in with so many precautions that ultimate escape would be a very doubtful affair indeed.

And for this reason Turpin hoped that it was no friend of his who was at work with the intention of effecting his escape.

Impatiently Dick waited to see what was going to happen next.

As he sat thus waiting, he became conscious that the cell was gradually growing lighter.

He could distinguish the walls—his own limbs—and the rude table upon which his meals were served.

At first he was inclined to attribute this increased vision to the expansion of the pupils of the eyes, for he had more than once noticed how, after a short stay in a place that had at first seemed utterly dark, he had been gradually able to define objects.

But the lightness kept increasing, and that to such an extent that he was unable any longer to attribute it to the cause which we have named.

Raising his head he looked towards the grated aperture

of the cell, through which a small glimpse of the sky could be obtained.

Then the mystery of the accession of light was dissipated at once.

A number of small, white, fleecy clouds were flitting rapidly across.

Dick Turpin had not been out upon so many nocturnal excursions as he had without noting with a particular eye the various aspects of the ever-varying sky.

By the mere look, then, of these fleecy clouds, he was able to tell with certainty that the moon was not far distant, and that it was her silvery rays which gave them the appearance that they wore.

This would account for his being able to see about him so well as he did.

And he was destined to see even more distinctly, for the edge of the moon now appeared at one side of the grating.

At first it was but a mere silver thread, but as the moon continued her rapid motion towards the west, it increased in size, until the whole of the full round face of the orb of night was visible.

When this was the case, the interior of Dick Turpin's cell was even more brilliantly lighted up than it was during the greatest part of the day, and every object could be seen with remarkable distinctness, though, as is always the case with moonlight, sharp black shadows were thrown.

It was just when the moon had thus attained her full power, and the cell was so well illuminated, that the scorching sound became louder and louder, until it suddenly ceased.

It was succeeded by a creaking, cracking noise, and this was caused by Adrian's efforts to move the stone up and down, and so loosen the mortar where he could not reach to pick it away with his rude yet effectual implement.

It so happened that the rays of the moon, coming as they did in rather a slanting direction into the cell, fell with full force and distinctness upon the very wall on the other side of which Adrian was at work.

Such being the case, it was an easy enough matter for Dick, who was guided by the sound, to fix his eyes upon the identical stone which was being displaced.

He saw it rise and fall, and move to the right side and then to the left, with a slightly perceptible motion.

Then that ceased, and the stone began to gradually and gradually come out of its setting, until it projected from the wall.

Dick Turpin knew that the jailers had told him that wall was all which divided him from Adrian Winberry, and yet he fancied he must have made some mistake, and that he was situated on the other side of the cell.

He was puzzled to find a motive for Adrian working a way into his cell.

What possible object could it serve?

He had fancied he would make an attempt to escape, from the daring with which he had attempted to carry out his other schemes, and had expressed his opinion to that effect upon more than one occasion when conversing with his jailers; but then, he thought, the last place Adrian would think of attacking would be that wall, upon which, however, it was plain an attack was most unquestionably being made.

For, behold, the piece of stone projects further and further into the cell as the pressure from behind is steadily applied to it.

Ere long the mystery of this nocturnal worker would be revealed.

So, with straining eyes, Dick watched the moving stone, upon which the moon's rays fell with such brightness that he could see every grain in it.

The stone grated and creaked as it came forward little by little, until at length, as we have described, it fell with a crash upon the floor of Turpin's cell, into which, of course, Adrian was immediately able to see.

The cry which had come from his lips was caused by his first view of Dick's countenance.

He recognised him instantly, for Dick's face was fully turned towards the moonbeams.

On his side Dick Turpin was not slow to recognise the countenance of Adrian Winberry, which was such a peculiar one, and so firmly imprinted upon his memory, that it was impossible for him to mistake it.

In an instant Dick comprehended, by the cry and the

look of vexation and rage which overspread Adrian's features, what had occurred.

Adrian had forced his way in there by mistake.

When his eyes rested upon his sinister-looking face projecting from the hole in the wall, and clearly defined by the light, Dick sprang to his feet, and almost immediately recovering from his surprise, clutched Adrian tightly round the throat, and with main force strove to drag him into the cell.

But he did this easily, for Adrian Winberry, so far from doing anything to impede his progress, actually assisted it.

As soon, however, as he felt his feet upon the firm floor of the dungeon, he made a sudden stand, and with an exertion of strength which we should never have given him credit for possessing, he released himself from Turpin's grasp, and followed up this advantage by fixing his bony fingers in his throat with a vice-like grip.

Dick felt the power of the compression, and knew that unless he succeeded in releasing himself from his adversary's grasp at once, he would soon be put out of the power of doing so.

A furious struggle now ensued.

Adrian Winberry was choked with rage and endowed with thrice his ordinary strength.

The thought that he had had all his careful work for nothing maddened him, but he resolved if his escape was frustrated, he would not be balked out of his revenge.

He saw before him—he held in his grip—the man who had proved himself to be his most dangerous enemy, and to whom might be entirely attributed his discovery, condemnation, and imprisonment.

Nerved, then, with hate, he struggled furiously with Dick.

But our hero soon recovered his coolness.

By a skillful manoeuvre he extricated himself from his grasp.

Then throwing the whole weight of his body into one blow, he bore his antagonist to the earth.

Here the struggle was renewed.

But Dick was uppermost.

And now the most unequivocal signs were given that the prison authorities had been aroused by the tumult.

CHAPTER CCCXX.

ADRIAN WINBERRY IS ACCOMMODATED WITH A SET OF JEWELLERY, AND FORTHWITH REMOVED TO STRONGER QUARTERS.

LIGHTS gleamed along the corridor, and there was the trampling of many feet without.

The alarm had been given, and the various officials whose duty it was to watch during the night were hastening to the scene of tumult.

Dick heard them coming with no little satisfaction, for Adrian Winberry, in his present furious state of mind, was anything but a comfortable opponent, and he would not care how soon he got rid of him.

Accordingly, hearing the turnkeys approach, he raised his voice, and called aloud to them.

He was heard, and directly afterwards a key was thrust into the cell door, which was unlocked and thrown open.

An astonished-looking group appeared upon the threshold.

What was their surprise to see two persons on the floor of the cell, struggling furiously with each other.

Those turnkeys were, however, rather accustomed to sudden surprises, and they soon recovered from this one.

Several of them, darting forward, seized hold of both the combatants, and forcibly separated them.

It was then they received another shock, for, to their unbounded astonishment, they found one of the combatants was Adrian Winberry.

Having made this discovery, they did not require to be told how he had gained admission there.

One glance at the breach in the stone wall was enough to tell them that.

"Run for the governor," said one, "and bring him here at once."

A turnkey immediately set off upon this errand.

While he was gone, those who remained divided themselves into two groups.

One held Dick Turpin tightly in their grasp, in order that he should not make any sudden attempt at escape, or rush at his foe.

The other kept hold of Adrian Winberry for precisely the same reason.

But the courage and strength which had hitherto sustained that bold bad man, seemed at this juncture to utterly abandon him.

He had received rather rough usage during his struggle with Dick, and he showed upon his person several marks of it.

His head was now bowed down upon his breast, and he looked utterly dejected.

And who can wonder at it?

He had had the chance of escape, he had used what might fairly be deemed superhuman exertions, but, owing to one fatal error, he had lost all, for now their suspicious were aroused, he would be effectually debarred of all further chances of accomplishing his aim.

He must resign himself to that death which he so well deserved.

Not many minutes elapsed before the turnkey who had been dispatched to fetch the governor returned, bringing that individual with him.

Mr. Cawthorn prided himself upon his personal promptness on all matters connected with the prison.

As he came along the turnkey had communicated to him an outline of the facts which had occurred, so that the governor did not display that astonishment which he would have done if he had entered the cell wholly unprepared.

He set about questioning the turnkeys first, who deposed to having heard shouts and cries, and the scuffling noise which a struggle produces, and, finding the noises to proceed from that cell, they entered it, when they found Dick Turpin on the floor of the cell with Adrian Winberry beneath him, and that, upon turning to look how he came there, they had seen the hole in the dungeon wall.

The governor walked up to this and examined it himself with great care and attention.

Then, turning to Turpin, he asked him for an account of what had taken place.

Dick complied with his demand, and, as he had no reason for keeping back any circumstance connected with the affair, he told all—how he had been awoke from sleep by some slight noise—how that noise had been repeated—and how he watched the wall from which it appeared to come, until the stone was forced out of its setting, and Adrian Winberry's face appeared at the aperture, when, coming to the conclusion that he was in the act of endeavouring to effect an escape, he had clutched him by the throat until the turnkeys arrived and spared him the necessity of doing so any longer.

To this narrative Mr. Cawthorn listened with the most profound attention, and, upon looking round again, he could see so many things corroborative of it that he could not withhold his belief.

He ordered a set of heavy fetters to be brought into the cell, and for the smith to be called up.

While his men were absent upon this errand, Mr. Cawthorn occupied himself with an examination of the hole in the wall through which the prisoner had made his way.

For this purpose he took a lantern from one of the turnkeys, and disappeared through the aperture into the adjoining cell.

In the meantime, the other jailers, who had received no orders to the contrary, kept a firm hold upon Adrian and Dick.

Upon crawling through the opening, Mr. Cawthorn saw the corresponding stone lying in the next cell, with a heap of mortar near it.

Still he was at a loss to think how it had been dislodged.

He saw the fragments of the broken pitoher, but the thought never once occurred to him that they had been used for the purpose, or that, indeed, they could be of any possible service.

But there were the stones, sure enough, and by the appearance they presented it was quite evident that they had been freshly removed.

This was the extent of the governor's discoveries in that quarter, and so, probably as it was the nearest way, he crawled back through the hole into Turpin's cell.

At this moment the smith arrived, carrying a small portable anvil, some rivets, and a hammer.

There was a sleepy look about his eyes, and every now and then he yawned in such a manner that his jaw-bone was in imminent danger of dislocation.

Behind him came a couple of turnkeys, who dragged after them a set of fetters.

The passage of the iron links over the floor of the corridor made a hideous noise.

In answer to the question which the smith propounded, as to which of the prisoners he was to oblige with a set of jewellery, Adrian Winberry was pointed out, so he at once turned his attention towards him.

But his task was easy enough.

The prisoner was quite passive in his hands, and suffered himself to be loaded with the chains without the least resistance.

The task of riveting them on did not occupy much time, and then Adrian was quite helpless, and in a much worse position, so far as effecting his escape went, than he was before, because now, as a preliminary step, he would have to divest himself of the heavy mass of iron.

As soon as all this was done, Mr. Cawthorn directed Adrian to be removed, specifying the dungeon to which he was to be taken.

It was in a part of the prison even then rarely used for the incarceration of prisoners.

At the present day it has wholly disappeared, and scarce even the tradition of its existence remains in the memory of the officials.

It was entirely underground, and its position may be indicated by saying it was under what is now the western portion of Newgate-market.

This was a remnant of the old prison, built some time in the eleventh or twelfth century.

The dungeons in this part were, of course, almost always in a state of utter darkness.

Noisome exhalations and disgusting reptiles, ever the accompaniments of such places, were there in plenty, making it a most disagreeable part to sojourn in.

But to make an escape from that part of Newgate was justly held to be impossible, from the fact of it being underground, and from every precaution having been taken to prevent any prisoner confined there from making his way through the surface.

Mr. Cawthorn did not accompany the turnkeys who led Adrian Winberry, heavily laden as he was, to this cell, but determined to visit him after he was properly installed there. As soon as he had departed, he made a sign to those who held Turpin in their grasp to release him. They obeyed.

Mr. Cawthorn was not and could not be blind to the value of the service which Dick had rendered him by interfering and putting a stop to what, judging by what had been done, looked like Adrian's successful attempt to escape from Newgate.

But it was not exactly the thing for the governor of a prison to be on good terms with one of the prisoners, no matter what services might have been rendered.

And yet Mr. Cawthorn did not like to go without saying something.

"How was it," he asked, "that you interfered in this matter? Why did you not join your services to his and endeavour to effect an escape between you?"

"For a very simple reason."

"What is it?"

"In the first place, I have pledged my word not to make any effort to escape; and in the second, I have such a horror and detestation of Adrian Winberry and his crimes that I could not put myself under an obligation to him, or act in concert with him in any way."

"I see. And so you grappled with him, and held him tightly until assistance arrived?"

"Just so."

"Well, Turpin, I may as well confess the fact as not, but by acting in the matter you have to-night, you have rendered me a very great service, and I am not the sort of man to forget it."

Dick bowed.

"By what I can see," he continued, "he seemed to have every prospect of finishing what he has so successfully began, and I need not conceal from you the fact that, if any one so persistently abhorred as he is had succeeded

in making his escape, I should in all probability have forfeited my situation."

"If what I have done is any good to you," replied Dick, "you are heartily welcome to it, but nothing was done with that intention, speaking candidly."

The governor smiled.

"Well—well," he said, "I darsay you don't look upon me with very friendly eyes, but I can't help that, you know. But you might be in prison under a worse governor, I can tell you that."

"I have no fault to find with you," said Dick, "and as I said before, if what I have done is of any benefit to you, I am glad, and you are heartily welcome."

"Very good—very good. But there is one thing which puzzles me."

"What is it?"

"Why did Adrian work his way to your cell, instead of out into the passage?"

"There I confess you puzzle me."

"Do I?"

"You do, indeed."

"Have you no idea?"

"I could scarcely say no to that, and speak truthfully."

"Then you have some idea?"

"Yes."

"What is the opinion you have formed? for if you will believe me, I am quite at fault in the matter."

"I may be wrong, but still this is the view I take. Is not Adrian Winberry's lawyer, Mr. Skinner, confined in one of these cells?"

"Yes."

"In the one which adjoins that?"

Dick pointed, as he asked this question, to the cell which had up to such a little while ago been tenanted by Adrian.

"Yes."

"In fact," said Dick, "as Adrian stood in his cell, my dungeon was on one side of him, and Mr. Skinner's on the other."

"Precisely. He was placed between you both."

"That is what I thought."

"But what of that?"

"Adrian would perhaps learn in some way the contingency of his rascally accomplice, and think that he should have a better chance of success if he broke into the lawyer's cell, and obtained his assistance."

"I see. And so you think that Adrian made a mistake somehow, and took your cell for Mr. Skinner's."

"Just so."

"And did not find out his mistake until you had him by the throat?"

"Yes."

"Well, it may be as you say. At any rate, I cannot help expressing my obligations to you. I shall have to find you fresh quarters, of course, but I suppose you will not object to that."

"Not if I am no worse lodged than I am at present."

"I will see to that."

"Would you allow me to make a suggestion?"

"Certainly, what is it?"

"It is that you should visit your other three prisoners, Norman, Sare, and Skinner."

"I had intended to do so."

"I see you understand your duties better than I can tell them you."

The governor bowed, and felt pleased at this compliment.

"Come this way," he said. "You shall have the next cell along the passage."

Dick Turpin was led out of the dungeon by the jailers. He could not leave it without some regret, because it was there where he had been honoured with a visit from the idol of his heart, Maud Gouldman.

He could fancy just where she stood, and stand upon the same spot himself, but now he was going to be deprived of even that slight pleasure.

Regretfully, then, Dick cast his eyes around the cell, and took a farewell glance at it.

The next moment he stood in the passage, and directly afterwards was installed in the next cell, and which was in every respect similar to the one which he had just left.

Mr. Cawthorn acted upon Dick's suggestion, and made a round of the prison.

But he found his prisoners all safe.

Last of all he repaired to Adrian's dungeon, and had him carefully searched, but he was unable to find upon his person any instrument which would have assisted him to remove the two large stones.

He quite overlooked the pieces of platter.

CHAPTER CCCXXI.

OLD MATTHEW GAINS A COMPLETE VICTORY OVER MR. WRIGGLES.

THE effect of the blow which Sixteen-String Jack struck the officer who was struggling with Claude Duval in the little bit of a yard belonging to the "White Horse" Inn, was instantaneous.

It was delivered with great precision.

His fist went with full force against the officer's ear.

He dropped down like a shot.

They had nothing further to fear from him for some time at least.

He was quite incapable of speech and motion.

But the three highwaymen were fully conscious that an alarm had been given—that, indeed, the sounds of the little conflict they had had must have reached the ears of the police-officers in the private bar-parlour.

It, therefore, became incumbent upon them to make up their minds quickly as to what was the best thing to be done, and to lose no time in carrying their designs into effect.

The reader may be sure they did not forget that old Matthew had made particular mention of a door which he informed them would take them out into White Horse-yard.

They glanced hastily round in search of it, and, as soon as it met their view, they made a dash in that direction.

Not a word was said, but the action was simultaneous.

This door was situated in a high brick wall.

It was locked, but the key was sticking in the lock, so, without loss of time, they turned it round and flung the door open.

It was at this moment that old Matthew made his appearance in the manner detailed at the close of a preceding chapter.

The officers had not arrived.

Our friends were in the act of rushing through the door, when the voice of old Matthew restrained them.

They halted and looked round.

They saw his face pale with anxiety.

"Quick—quick," he said. "Quick, for your lives, and for my credit. Leave the door wide open just as it is, and come to me. Quick—quick; all will yet be well."

Our three friends had unbounded faith in old Matthew's ability and willingness to aid them, so, without an instant's hesitation—without, indeed, reflecting upon the matter, they obeyed his commands to the very letter.

They hastened to where he stood, which was just inside the recess which had hitherto found them such a secure hiding-place.

He dragged them back into it again and closed the door—which from the yard could not be distinguished from the rest of the wall—just in time.

Before he had time to slip the little bolt which secured it into its sockets, the officers, with cries of rage, rushed into the yard.

But Matthew, unfurried by this circumstance, properly fastened the door, and then said to our friends—

"Remain where you are, and do not offer to stir for your lives. I have not time to explain what I am going to do, but you will know presently. Have faith in me and all will be well."

Then, wheeling his arm-chair until it occupied just the same position as it did when the officers left him, he sank down again into it in precisely the same attitude as before.

Old Matthew did not wait to hear any reply to this speech, but hastily made his way into the parlour again, and with all speed possible closed the cunningly contrived secret door.

The reader, doubtless, comprehends the motive for his conduct, and guesses at the means by which he meant to baffl Mr. Wriggles and the oers.

He calculated that upon making their way into the yard and catching sight, first of their prostrate comrade and then of the open door, they would fall into the mistake of supposing that they had made their escape through it, and rush off in consequence.

Then, in the event of any of them returning to the parlour they would find him composedly seated just where he had been left.

Old Matthew's calculations were cunningly made, and the sequel proved that they were in every respect correct.

The officers, and Mr. Wiggles included, fell blindly into the trap which he had laid for them.

We will relate what took place.

Mr. Wiggles, upon hearing the shout which the officer in the yard uttered, knew in a moment that his prey had been seen.

But, ere he could move, so quick were Claude Duval's motions, he heard a struggle, which ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

Uttering a shout to his men, he dashed out of the parlour into the bar, and out of the bar into the passage beyond it, with the intention of making his way into the yard from which the cry had come.

But the "White Horse" Inn was built in rather an intricate manner, and for a stranger, it was no easy matter for him to find his way from one part of it to another.

Excited as Mr. Wiggles was, it is scarcely to be wondered if he did what any one in his cool blood would be likely to have done—namely, missed his way to the yard.

But altogether he did not lose a couple of minutes, but, when important events are taking place, a couple of minutes is a long time.

It is long enough to decide the fate of a kingdom.

But Mr. Wiggles discovered his error, and made another, and this time more successful, effort to reach the yard.

As old Matthew had fully anticipated, the first thing which met his gaze and the gaze of his men was the police-officer lying at full length in the yard, just as he had been struck down by Sixteen-String Jack.

Beyond a cursory glance, however, Mr. Wiggles paid no attention to this prostrate officer.

Other and more important objects occupied him.

He gave a hasty glance round the yard.

No one was visible.

There were no traces of any one.

The door which old Matthew had closed, and which was all that separated our friends from their foes, was perfectly invisible, and all of a piece with the wall in which it was placed.

Perhaps a very close examination might have detected it, but Mr. Wiggles just then was not likely to bestow a close examination upon anything.

He saw the door leading into White Horse-yard.

He could not have helped doing so.

There was no concealment about that.

It was flung wide open upon its hinges, as far as ever it would go.

Now the idea which immediately seized upon Mr. Wiggles, as well as those who were with him, was one which would have seized upon anybody.

It was that the highwaymen had got out into the yard, struck down the officer, and then rushed through the gate.

He could scarcely arrive at any other supposition.

Accordingly, with a loaded pistol in one hand and his drawn sword in the other, he rushed out into White Horse-yard.

He then had the choice of turning either to the right or the left in the alley.

The first would have taken him to the slums of Clare-market and Lincoln's-inn Fields.

The other to the classic region of Drury-lane.

There was nothing to guide them either way, so he shouted out an hasty order for his troop to divide itself into two portions, one to take one route, and one the other.

He chose himself to go in the direction of Clare-market because he thought that would be the most likely.

In Stanhope-street, however, he found one of the men who had been set to keep watch.

Breathless and exhausted, Mr. Wiggles stopped before him, and asked whether he had seen anything of the three highwaymen.

The man replied in the negative, and averred that they were the only persons who had emerged from White Horse-yard while he had been standing there, because he had fixed his eyes upon it, and never moved them off once.

This was conclusive, and Mr. Wiggles was driven to the conviction that the highwaymen must have turned up towards Drury-lane.

Accordingly, without losing a moment, he made his way in that direction.

But, just as he was entering the alley, he met the other half of his men returning.

Upon asking them the reason, they said that they had come to the conclusion that the highwaymen had gone Lincoln's-inn Fields way, because the man on guard at the Drury-lane end of White Horse-yard had most solemnly declared the three highwaymen had not passed him.

Mr. Wiggles glared like a hyena in the face of the man who made this communication.

Then he uttered a dismal howl, and turned round two or three times upon his heels.

But that process did not seem to have much effect in clearing his brains.

Somehow or other the conviction crept over him that he had been "sold."

But how it occurred he could not for the life of him make out.

In such a state of rage and anger that he scarcely knew what he was about, he knocked his hat firmly on his head and ran back to the inn yard.

His men followed at his heels in a disorderly throng.

Arrived here, Mr. Wiggles looked once more about him.

But there was nothing more to see.

The officer, however, who had been knocked down, began by this time to evince symptoms of returning animation.

He was raised to his feet.

"Bring him in," shouted Wiggles. "Follow me. Bring him in, I say."

Thus speaking, the irate police-officer made his way back into the inn.

Upon entering the private parlour, he saw old Matthew, the landlord, seated in his chair just where he had left him.

He never once thought he had moved.

"Haven't you found them?" asked old Matthew, quietly.

The question seemed to exasperate the discomfited police-officer to the utmost degree.

He caught hold of his hat, and uttering a volley of curses, dashed it on the ground.

His wig followed, the only difference being that this was dashed down with even greater vehemence than the hat.

Then, in the extremity of his rage, he executed a kind of war-dance upon them, all the while pouring out curses with great volubility, until at length he was compelled to stop from sheer want of breath.

In the meantime the officer was led in, and sat down upon a chair.

One of his comrades took French leave with the brandy, and, pouring some from a bottle on the table, forced it down his throat.

The man gasped and coughed, and began to show signs of rapid recovery from his state of insensibility.

Old Matthew grew uneasy again.

He did not know how much this man might have seen, or how much he was in a position to tell.

Most fervently did he wish that Sixteen-String Jack had hit him a little harder.

But he would have to abide by the course of events, he could do no more just then but float like a straw upon the current.

The man was revived.

Then questioned.

At first his answers were rather confused, for his mind was not in a very lucid state.

All that could be elicited from the fellow, however, was this

He had seen the three highwaymen suddenly make their appearance in the yard.

Then one grappled with him, and while they were struggling another came up and knocked him down.

After that he recollected nothing, except that he had a remembrance of seeing three shadowy figures rush across the yard and open the gate.

Old Matthew drew a long breath.

He was safe.

Mr. Wriggles rubbed his bald pate with a puzzled air.

As yet he had elucidated nothing, or at all events, nothing but what had tended to confirm his own previous ideas on the subject.

He turned to old Matthew.

"You have had a narrow squeak this time, old fellow," he said. "The men I wanted were here, that's clear enough, although you so stoutly denied it, and they appear to have got away, but how I can't exactly make out. I shall soon hear tidings of them, never fear."

"Mr. Wriggles."

"What?"

"I wish you would leave me in peace."

"I daresay."

"Why do you persecute me like you do?"

"Ha! ha!"

"You have never found anything in my house."

"Through your cleverness."

"And never will."

"I hope so."

"You won't. As for these three highwaymen, if they did come in it was without my knowledge or contrivance, and if they hid themselves anywhere about the premises they appear to have got off and without my knowledge or contrivance, too, for have I not been seated here all the time?"

Mr. Wriggles could not deny the latter part of old Matthew's speech, but he considered the commencement of it was open to very grave doubt indeed.

However, he did not say a word about that, but merely remarked—

"I suppose I must give up the game this time, but mark me, my friend, I shall keep a very sharp look-out after you."

"Oh! never mind; don't trouble yourself about that," said Matthew.

"Oh! it's no trouble, I assure you."

"Well, if you don't like to spare yourself the trouble, I wish you would spare me the inconvenience of your visits."

"I daresay. But it's easy enough—you shouldn't find shelter for such gentry as you do."

"There you go again. You really are the most ridiculous man—"

"Well—well, Matthew," said Mr. Wriggles, assuming an off-hand air which sat with very bad grace upon him, "we will say no more about what has happened. I daresay they have got far enough off by this time, and are pretty safe. I am sorry I had any suspicions of you. Good morning, Matthew, good morning. Follow me, my men. We will be off, for we can do no more good here. Come—along, come along. Good morning, Matthew."

"Good morning. But are you really off?"

"Yes."

"Won't you have anything to drink?"

"Not now, thank you. We must be off, or the gentlemen we want will get too far away for us. Good morning."

In another moment Mr. Wriggles had gone, taking his men with him.

CHAPTER CCCCXII.

AFFAIRS GROW STILL MORE COMPLICATED AT THE "WHITE HORSE" INN, AND OUR FRIENDS FIND THAT THOUGH MR. WRIGGLES HAS GONE AWAY THEY ARE IN AS MUCH DANGER AS EVER.

NO sooner, however, had Mr. Wriggles passed through the doorway, after having uttered the words with which the preceding chapter concluded, than old Matthew, who had never offered to move from his arm-chair, put his finger to the side of his nose, and perpetrated a series of knowing winks, although there was no one by to perceive them.

Then in a low voice he muttered, as well as subdued chuckling laugh would let him—

"Not so green, Mr. W., not so green. Old Matthew wasn't born yesterday, and it would require a cleverer bit of acting than that to take him in. All right, my boy, you are done—done brown."

As he uttered these words, old Matthew rose quietly from his seat and crept stealthily across the parlour.

He could see into the bar, but not one of the officers were there—or at all events none were visible.

The worthy landlord was in a fright for fear the highwaymen should jump to the conclusion that now the officers had left the parlour the coast was clear, and injudiciously make their appearance.

He was equally in dread of communicating with them, and telling them to be sure not to move until he gave them permission to do so, for he had more than a suspicion that Mr. Wriggles had hit upon some clever scheme, and was about to play some very deep game indeed.

But whatever it was, we are not afraid of old Matthew being equal to it.

Mr. Wriggles' sudden change of manner, from the extreme of ungovernable rage to forced hilarity, was carefully noted by the landlord, and he drew his own conclusions from it.

Just at present, owing to being alive to the necessity of being well upon his guard, he felt himself to be in a quandary.

However, he felt the only thing he could do would be to rely upon the discretion of our friends. He fancied they would have too much good sense to emerge from their hiding-place until they were told it was safe for them to do so, especially after having such a narrow escape as they had.

Accordingly, he stepped into the bar.

Going to the window, from which a view of the passage and the front door could be obtained, he looked towards the street.

But there was no one about.

The police-officers certainly seemed as if they had left the premises.

From the bar window old Matthew made his way to the front door.

He looked up and down Drury-lane, first to the right and then to the left.

But there was not the least trace of any one of them visible.

While standing on the door-step, a man lounged up to him and said—

"Then you have got rid of your disagreeable visitors, Mr. Gale?"

Old Matthew turned round sharply, and looked keenly and suspiciously in the face of the man who had addressed these words to him.

He was a stranger—at least, the landlord had no recollection of having seen him before.

"Yes, they have gone I fancy."

"Oh! yes, I saw them myself."

"Oh! did you? Which way did they go?"

"Down Wych-street."

"Towards the Strand?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I didn't know which way they had gone. They have put me to a great deal of trouble, and I am glad enough to get rid of them."

"I daresay you are," said the man, with a knowing wink; "they didn't find who they wanted, did they?"

"No."

"You're a clever one, you are. I shall come to you when I am in trouble."

"Oh! shall you?"

"Yes, I know you will be able to hide me from the grubs safe enough."

"Don't you place too much confidence in me, my friend; but I must go in and put my heels to rights, for they have upset everything."

"I don't s'pose they are very particular about what they do, eh?"

"Not very."

"Well, I'll just come in and wet my whistle."

Old Matthew would much have preferred his room to his company, but he could not tell him so without exciting his suspicion, and that was a thing to be most specially avoided.

So he said not a word, but walked in doors with the man close at his heels.

It is almost unnecessary to say that old Matthew suspected this man to be some agent of Wriggles.

But still he was not sure.

Matthew walked into the bar, and the man stood just at the little window through which the different liquors were served.

"I'll have a 'go' of gin," he said.

A small quantity of gin was put into a measure and handed to him.

The man seemed much inclined to stand and be talkative.

Leaning his hands upon the window-ledge, he looked at the door communicating with the parlour, which had been battered down by the police.

"They have been knocking the place about, I see," he said. "Now, do you want anybody to help you put your house in order, because, if you do, I'm your man? I have got no work to do to-day, and I'm a capital carpenter."

"No," said old Matthew. "I have a man that I always employ to do any jobs about the house."

As he spoke, Matthew fidgeted about the bar, and went into the parlour and came out again, but all to no purpose, there stood the man as provoking as possible, as though he did not intend to go for some time yet.

Old Matthew went out of the bar, and turned the key in the lock.

He directed his steps towards the back door.

While he was in sight of the man he saunters along, but as soon as he felt sure he could not see him, he ran with great quickness across the yard to the bar-window looking out into it.

He got close to this and peeped in, allowing the smallest portion possible of his head to be seen.

He was well rewarded for his trouble.

The man who had drank the glass of gin gave a stealthy glance around him, and, seeing nothing, imagined the coast to be clear.

In a moment, then, and with the exertion of an agility really remarkable, the man raised himself on to the window-ledge.

Then he carefully and quickly lowered himself till he stood inside the bar.

Here, however, he did not hesitate, for doubtless he was aware of the necessity there was for being quick in his movements.

He glanced quickly round him, as though in search of some place of concealment.

He espied, just under the counter we have so often mentioned, a small cupboard.

The key was sticking in the lock.

He turned it, and opened the door.

The interior seemed to afford him satisfaction, and in much less time than it takes us to write it, he was inside the cupboard.

Then he pulled the door close after him, though, of course, he was unable to lock it.

Convinced that he had no more to see, old Matthew withdrew from his position at the window looking into the yard.

His suspicions were now fully realized.

He was sure beyond all doubt, that this man was a spy employed by Mr. Wriggles to watch for the spot where the highwaymen were concealed.

Matthew could not divest himself of the idea that there was at least one police-officer concealed, either in the bar itself or else somewhere close at hand.

He had still a very difficult part to play.

The officers were by no means foiled yet.

The most important and necessary thing for him to do was to give warning to the highwaymen, and let them know what was taking place.

But how to do this was the difficulty.

Suddenly old Matthew thought of communicating with them through the secret door which opened into the yard.

When the thought occurred to him, he was quite at a loss to think how it was it had not crossed his mind before.

However, there was plenty of time yet for it to be acted upon.

Matthew stepped across the yard, and as a precautionary measure, secured the door.

Having done this, he looked about him, but he could not see anyone.

Going then, to the secret door, the exact position of which was well known to him—he knocked upon it in a significant manner.

Then he said, in a low voice, and yet he spoke in a tone loud enough to reach the ears of those for whom it was intended—

"It is I—Matthew. Open the door a little way, but silently. Make no noise. I have something important to say to you."

"What is it?"

"There is danger."

The words were uttered with great rapidity.

He put his mouth close to the crevice of the door as he spoke.

He was heard.

Tom King, as silently as he possibly could, withdrew the little bolt, and opened the door to the extent of about half-an-inch.

Conversation was now an easy matter.

"What is it, Matthew?" asked Tom King: "did you say there was danger?"

"Yes."

"Imminent?"

"Very."

"What next?"

"Listen to me."

"We are all attention."

"You have not moved?"

"No."

"Nor attempted to get out?"

"No."

"That's fortunate."

"You give quite a sigh of relief."

"And well I might."

"Why?"

"Old Wriggles has gone."

"We heard him."

"I mean he has pretended to go."

"Oh!"

"And he is in hopes of catching us. But patience. You keep still where you are, and leave the rest to me. I'll be a match for him, I'll warrant."

"And so will I. We are much beholden to you, Matthew."

"Oh! don't mention it."

"We won't move."

"No, pray don't, until I come to the door and give you permission, or you will spoil all."

"But you won't keep us in here longer than is necessary?"

"Not a moment."

"That's all right, then."

"Now I'm off. There's a man concealed in the bar."

"The devil there is. Do you think he can hear us?"

"No."

"I breathe again. What are you going to do with him? How shall you manage?"

"Leave that to me."

"I can do that safely, I know."

"If I don't give him pepper, and make him wish he had never seen the 'White Horse' in his life, call me a Dutchman."

With these words, which perhaps the vanity of the landlord was not free from thinking were very appropriate ones to close a conversation with, he closed the door, and directly afterwards had the satisfaction of hearing the little bolt shot into its socket.

With great deliberation Matthew crossed the yard.

"Now for the gentlemen in the cupboard. It will do me good, that will. It almost makes my eyes water when I think of it."

What excellent plan it was which old Matthew had devised for the discomfiture of the spy, we shall very quickly see.

Having crossed the yard, he entered the house by the legitimate back door.

But he did not go direct to the bar.

On the contrary, after having given one glance to see that all was right, he proceeded a few paces along a passage, until he came to a flight of stairs leading to some underground region.

It was to the kitchen.



[JUDGE HOLLYOAK'S INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN.]

Entering the place, which was in a state of semi-darkness, he directed his steps to the fireplace in search of something.

What it was could not be seen at first, but presently he lifted off the coals a kettle.

It was a large kettle.

From the careful way in which he had handled it, and from the fact of his carrying it at arm's length, one might easily come to the conclusion that it was full of boiling water.

And such, indeed, was the case, and when the worthy landlord emerged into the passage, where it was somewhat lighter, clouds of vapour could be seen issuing from the spout and from the lid, which kept fluttering up and down.

In this place old Matthew's face could be caught a glimpse of, and its expression noted.

His eyes were twinkling, and very bright.

His mouth was distorted into a grin.

Altogether, any one looking at him would have come No. 61.—BLACK BEES.

to the conclusion that he meditated some very capital practical joke, or, at all events, that he was bent upon mischief of some sort.

So he was, and, not only that, he meant to have a little revenge as well.

Crossing the passage, he paused a moment at the bar-door while he unlocked it.

Then entering, he put the kettle of hot water down on the counter, at the same time muttering in a half-audible tone, some disrespectful remarks about Mr. Wriggles.

CHAPTER CCCXXIII.

OLD MATTHEW HAS HIS REVENGE UPON THE SPY CONCEALED IN THE CUPBOARD.

If the unfortunate spy who had so cleverly concealed himself in the cupboard had had the least idea of what kind of fate was awaiting him, he would not have stopped there, screwed up into a most uncomfortable position, a moment longer, but, risking all, he would have made a

clear bound out, and got as far away from the "White Horse" as he could, in the smallest possible space of time.

But, alas! the spy was in utter ignorance of the door which was impending over him, and, so far from feeling any presentiment or dread, he was felicitating himself upon the great success which had attended his clever manoeuvre.

He was safe, he thought, and, from his capital place of concealment, all he had got to do was to watch all that was done, and take notice when the highwaymen appeared and were well off their guard.

The instructions given him by Mr. Wiggles—for that individual was firmly of opinion that the highwaymen were concealed somewhere about the premises—were to keep strict watch, and, when the favourable opportunity arrived, to blow a whistle enrill which he carried about him.

Mr. Wiggles and his men would take care to be somewhere close at hand, so that they could hear the signal as soon as it was given.

This was a very excellent plan, and great credit is due to Mr. Wiggles for having so promptly devised it.

One thing only was necessary to its success, and that was that the spy should hide himself somewhere and not be seen.

Now the spy was quite confident he had done this, although much easier than he could have hoped for.

But as we are aware, old Matthew peeped through the window and saw him.

Such was precisely the aspect which affairs presented upon that very memorable day, or rather evening, for night was fast closing in.

"Hallo!" said old Matthew, as he put down the kettle on the bar counter in the manner we have recorded. "I wonder where the chap is that had the go of gin. Oh! here's his glass, so I suppose he has gone. Confound him, if he had stayed I would have set him on at this door, for the sooner I get it mended the better I shall be pleased."

The spy was almost ready to groan when he heard the landlord utter these words, and he fervently wished he had stopped a little longer, for, of course, while employed in the capacity mentioned, he would have a much better chance of performing his mission.

But still, he tried to make himself content, and over and over again congratulated himself that Matthew had no suspicion of him, and that least of all he had an idea he was concealed in the cupboard.

By accident, apparently, Matthew managed to kick against the cupboard door, which was a little way ajar, and then in the most natural way in the world he muttered something about the door being unlocked.

At the same moment he stooped down, and pressing the door, shut it, and turned the key in the lock.

The spy was fast.

Old Matthew's face beamed all over with satisfaction.

As for the man in the cupboard, he could in no way interfere with what Matthew had done, though he mentally uttered some very diabolical curses upon his head.

Still, he was impressed with the idea that his presence was quite unsuspected.

We have all seen a cat play with a mouse before destroying it, and we suppose it was some such feeling which prompted old Matthew to dally with the officer when he might have done what he wanted to do at once.

Time was precious, however.

The top of the little cupboard formed a part of the bar counter.

Old Matthew moved aside the different articles upon it, and then, just in the centre of the top of the cupboard was a round hole about three quarters of an inch in diameter, into which a cork had been very tightly fitted like a plug, and the top cut off so as to be on a level with the rest of the counter.

This hole had been stopped up in the manner described because there was now no longer any use for it.

But, previous to some alterations that had been made, this hole was used to carry off whatever quantity of liquor was spilt, and for this purpose a pitcher was placed in the cupboard immediately under the hole, so as to receive all that ran through.

But now another place had been made, and a pipe was attached to it, which was a very great improvement, and even more convenient and clear than the old method.

Matthew, however, as soon as the counter was cleared, seemed as though he was about to revive the use of it, for he took down a corkscrew which hung on a hook, and, inserting the point into the cork, proceeded to draw it just as he would out of a bottle.

This he did without much trouble, although it had been fixed in its present position for a very long time.

As soon as the cork was out of the hole, he took a tannet, or tundish, and put the end of it in.

What the spy thought of all this is hard to say.

He was a prisoner.

Doubtless he heard old Matthew at work above him, though he would not be able to conjecture what he was about, nor, doubtless, would the ray of light which streamed through the hole above tend to enlighten him in any way.

He certainly did not anticipate the horrible fate of which he was soon to be made a victim.

It must be understood that the cupboard was of very limited dimensions.

The bottom of it was on the floor, and the height to the top about four feet.

It had no shelf dividing it—the inside was quite empty.

As for the width and depth of it, those dimensions just allowed the spy to squeeze himself into it, though in a very huddled-up fashion.

From this it will be seen that he occupied nearly the whole of the interior of the cupboard.

Old Matthew's plan must now be manifest, or, at all events, guessed at.

Having fixed the tundish into the hole in the counter, just as he would have fixed it into the neck of a bottle he wanted to fill, he raised the kettle of boiling water, and poured it into the vessel as fast as he could.

Of course, the result of this was the scalding fluid ran in a heavy and continuous stream on to the officer.

A horrible howl, which echoed and re-echoed through the building, was the result.

Then the officer commenced a violent struggle to release himself.

No flesh and blood could stand such treatment as that Old Matthew, however, took no notice.

With the utmost composure he continued emptying the boiling water out of the kettle.

When full, it held about a gallon, and it was little short of that quantity which the landlord emptied upon the spy.

It must have been dreadful to have received it. In the position he occupied, he must have been scalded from head to foot.

The officer made a terrible clamour.

He yelled, and shrieked, and struggled, and fought.

But all to no purpose.

Old Matthew had him secure.

Then the spy, maddened with pain, put the whistle to his lips, which he had all the time held conveniently in his grasp, and, concentrating all his energies into one blast, he blew it with such shrillness that old Matthew was fain to drop the kettle and stop his ears with his hands.

Having done this, the spy commenced afresh his efforts to release himself from his uncomfortable situation.

But the signal had been heard.

Mr. Wiggles and his men, who were lying in wait close at hand, as soon as the shrill, piercing sound reached their ears, felt confident that the trick had succeeded, and that the highwaymen were at last as good as in their power, so they rushed pell mell into the bar.

They arrived just in time to hear some furious yells, which came with full force of bodily anguish from the lips of the spy, and to see the cupboard shaken visibly.

Old Matthew assumed a look of the utmost surprise, curiosity, and dismay.

Before Mr. Wiggles could do more than glare about him—at any rate, before he could utter a word, there was a terrible crash.

The cupboard door was dashed open.

Out rolled the spy.

"Murder!" he shouted. "Oh! murder! Fire! The devil! Oh!—oh!—oh! Murder! Fire!"

"A man—a man," cried old Matthew, acting as though he knew nothing. "You have arrived just in time, Mr.

Wriggles. Seize him. Seize that man. Take him into custody. He is a thief, doubtless, and has concealed himself on my premises, intending to rob me. But, fortunately, an accident has discovered him. Take him into custody, Mr. Wriggles—take him into custody. I give him in charge."

"Murder," roared the spy. "Oh! murder. I'm murdered. I have been murdered with boiling oil. Oh! murder. The devil."

Now, Mr. Wriggles could tell to a trifle just what had taken place, but, nevertheless, he said, in his off-hand, blustering way—

"What's the meaning of all this?"

"Why, Mr. Wriggles," began the spy.

"Silence," said the officer, in a voice of thunder.

"I'll tell you all about it," said old Matthew, working himself up into a state of the utmost excitement. "I'll state the charge. Take him into custody. See that he does not escape."

"Do not make such a row," said Wriggles, with a frown which old Matthew enjoyed mightily. "Tell me what you have to say."

Mr. Wriggles found himself in rather a disagreeable predicament.

Old Matthew knew he had got him "in a hole," as he called it, and he determined to make the most he possibly could of the advantage he had gained.

"It's a most fortunate thing you came in just as you did. I wanted to clean down my place here after your visit, and see, there is the kettle I went to fetch to do it with. When I went out I left that man drinking gin at the bar-window, and when I came back his glass was there, but he was gone, so I supposed he had finished his draught and left the house. But it seems I was wrong. In doing down the counter, some of the hot water went down that hole, and then I heard a most awful howling. I was scared, I can tell you, when you came in, and then the cupboard was dashed open, as you saw. I give that man into your custody as a Bow-street officer. My charge against him is concealing himself on my premises with intent to commit a robbery."

Old Matthew uttered this long speech with the utmost volubility.

It was in vain Mr. Wriggles and the spy strove interjectionally to stop the current of his eloquence. He would not stay until he was compelled to do so by the exhausted condition of his lungs.

"Now look here, Matthew," said Mr. Wriggles, "you are a very clever fellow, and I give you credit for it. But don't come it too strong."

"No, d—n it!" yelled the spy. "I am all of a blister from head to heel."

"Silence," said Mr. Wriggles.

"Yes, sir—oh! yes, sir. But if you had only been in that infernal cupboard, and had a gallon of boiling water poured on to you like I have, you would not take it so d—d easy. Oh! curses."

A fresh accession of intolerable pain brought a volley of most horrible imprecations from his lips.

"Silence," said Mr. Wriggles again.

The discomfited spy's curses subsided into groans.

"Now, Matthew," continued Mr. Wriggles, addressing the landlord, "you have carried this game on very well, and so far you have been victorious, but you can't carry the joke any further. Of course you know and I know what it all amounts to. You have outwitted me this time. I sent my man to keep watch, but I suppose he played his part so clumsily that you detected the deception."

Old Matthew gave one of his most knowing winks, and put his finger to the side of his nose in a very sagacious manner.

"You don't get the better of me very easily, Mr. W., I can tell you that. I suppose, however, it's no good my telling you that those you want are not here."

"Not a bit of good."

"I thought not. You are a most unreasonable man. Well, I tell you so again, and you can do as you like about believing me. But, whether they are here or whether they are not, you will have to try some very good scheme before you catch them. So, for the present, I shall advise you to give it up."

"I suppose we must. But, mark me, I am not so sure that I am an officer than I am that you have got the highwaymen hidden somewhere on the premises. Don't

deny it!—it's no good you doing so. Now, I give you warning, I will surroit this house in such a manner that not a soul shall leave it without my knowledge."

"You are free to do just as you like about that. I should advise you, though, not to try the dodge on of sending a man in, or he might get into trouble."

"Yes, curse me!" said the spy, whose words were really of a very serious character; indeed, "curse me, if over I get into a cupboard again."

"I should think not, my friend," replied Matthew.

"Now, Mr. Wriggles, don't let's have any ill-will about this matter. You have done your best and I have done mine, so that's all right. Let's shake hands, and have a glass together."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mr. Wriggles. "for I have had almost enough of it this time."

"If you haven't, I know who has," said the spy, with a dolorous groan. "Whatever shall I do?"

Mr. Wriggles and old Matthew were unfeeling enough to laugh.

CHAPTER CCCXXIV.

OLD MATTHEW ACHIEVES A COMPLETE VICTORY OVER MR. WRIGGLES, AND HOLDS A CONSULTATION WITH THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN RESPECTING DICK TURPIN'S SITUATION IN NEWGATE.

It looked rather strange to see all the officers, Mr. Wriggles included, sit down in the parlour in the very seats our friends had occupied such a short time before, and throwing off all appearance of enmity, proceed to enjoy themselves.

Willingly enough old Matthew covered the table with plenty of drinkables of every description, and then he sat down at the table himself.

They were, now business was over, the best friends imaginable, and no one to have looked at them would have believed that they had so lately occupied such antagonistic positions with each other.

Such a scene as we are describing is, perhaps, one that would not be met with now.

On the whole, the police regulations of the present day are vastly superior to those of the good old times.

The police-officers and old Matthew were now hair fellows well met. They laughed, and talked, and smoked, and told tales; and in fact, enjoyed themselves, as Shakespeare has it, to the "top of their bent."

As for the highwaymen, cooped up as they were in the narrow recess, they were anything but jolly and comfortable while the officers were enjoying themselves, and they heartily wished them at the bottom of the sea.

However, as everything must have an end, excepting a circle, this carouse of the officers was at length brought to a conclusion, and they separated at length with expressions of the utmost goodwill towards each other.

As soon as they were gone—and old Matthew took care to see that every one went cut—he fastened up the front door, determined for that night at least, as he had in company, to shut up the house.

Having done this, he, with a great deal of reconnoitering, and watching, and prying into out-of-the-way nooks and corners, to make sure no one was hiding, went to the secret door in the wall and gave our friends permission to emerge.

They were heartily glad to do so, though they had kept their promise to the letter, and had not made the slightest attempt to come out, though they had the power of doing so.

But, having once got permission, the reader may be sure they did not lose any time, but stepped out into the bar, and stretched their limbs with the appearance of great relief.

And certainly they had found it very irksome to remain so long in one position without being able to move, though they preferred doing that to being captured.

They hastened, however, to press round old Matthew and congratulate him upon the success he had met with all through the adventure, and expressed their gratitude for the magnitude of the service he had rendered them.

Then they sat down—the table was cleared, the fire rekindled, fresh pipes brought in, and then they were quite comfortable.

The only thing which cast a gloom over their spirits

was the circumstance of Dick Turpin being a prisoner in Newgate.

It was only in a confused, impartial manner that our friends had heard what had taken place, so they would have old Matthew to tell all from beginning to end, when he did with a very great deal of willingness, for he had imbibed just sufficient to make him feel pleased at leaving himself talk.

Our friends were content to laugh heartily at the graphic description he gave of the agonies of the spy, and they could not withhold the admiration which they felt for the worthy landlord's capital plan of serving him out.

They were all quite inclined to think Mr. Wiggles was defeated, and that they would not be troubled with him for some time to come.

Whether they were right or not will very quickly appear.

They were jolly enough now about him, and exulted over his failure, for they knew he could not make another razzia upon the inn without their having ample notice of it, because all the doors were secured.

Their mirth waxed fast and furious.

It was Tom King who, in a manner of speaking, recalled them to themselves.

He spoke in a serious tone of voice.

"It's not just the thing for us to be here enjoying ourselves as we are and never so much as giving a thought about our absent companion!"

"That's very true," chimed in old Matthew, his voice becoming grave in a moment, for Dick Turpin was a special favourite with him, and he would gladly have incurred any amount of danger or personal inconvenience provided it was the means of doing him a service. "It's very true we ought not to be laughing and talking about nothing at all, like we have been, but we ought to avail ourselves to the utmost of the favourable chance presented to us of having a little quiet conversation together. I vote that before we separate we come to some sort of conclusion as to what is the best thing to be done."

"Hear, hear! Matthew," said the three friends in chorus.

"Bravo, Matthew! we quite agree with you."

"Very good, gentlemen, then what do you propose?"

"Let us consider a little first before we make a proposition," said Claude Duval.

"If I recollect right," remarked Sixteen-String Jack, "Tom King was in the act of saying something to us when his speech was interrupted by the officers breaking in."

"You are quite correct," said Tom King, seriously; "I was in the act of announcing my determination, and if you will allow me, I will resume where I left off."

"Hear—hear."

"Stop a moment," said old Matthew. "I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"You will excuse me for speaking?"

"Oh! of course. Let us hear what you were going to say."

"Well, then, gentlemen, since we had our conversation this afternoon, so many things have occurred that I declare they have quite driven all I have heard out of my head. Now, you must be something the same, so, in my humble judgment, it will be the best for all parties to make a fresh beginning, and reconsider the matter from the commencement."

"Agreed, Matthew, agreed. So we will."

The landlord complacently resumed his pipe and leant back in his chair, prepared to pay the utmost attention to all that might be said.

"Now we will retrace our steps," said Tom King, "but I don't think we need go any further back than this. You told us Dick was in Newgate, and all the events which had conspired to bring him there."

"Yes, I did."

"We may begin at that point, then."

"Very good."

"Well, then, continue."

"As I said before," resumed old Matthew, "as soon as I heard what was a'cluck I started off to Newgate, in the hopes of being able to obtain an interview with Dick, and ask him how he was, and see that he wanted nothing, but when I got to the wicket, the man on the lock knew me, and wouldn't let me in."

"What a shame."

"That's what I said, but it was no use. I tried all

manner of schemes to get admission, but they all failed."

"It seems they keep a very good guard."

"They do. They mean to keep him safe if they possibly can. You see, Dick has done such a many daring, desperate things in his lifetime, and the officers have never been able to lay hold of him once."

"He was very lucky."

"But, now they have got him into their clutches, they won't let him go very easily, I can tell you."

"We shall see, Matthew. Do you recollect what conclusion we came to before the officers interrupted us?"

"What was it?"

"Why, that as Dick Turpin was in Newgate, we must get him out."

"Just so."

"Now, from what you have just said, I opine that will be a very difficult matter."

"It won't be the easiest thing in the world, certainly."

"But never mind, Matthew, we don't mind running the gauntlet of a little danger, provided we can save a comrade's life by doing so, and, as for you, I know you have the wit and the cleverness to devise some scheme which we can carry out."

"Really, gentlemen, you flatter me—you do, indeed," said old Matthew, putting his hand upon his heart, and bowing in a deprecatory manner.

"No—no, not a bit of it, Matthew. Yours was capital scheme to convey a couple of files into Newgate, when I was confined there. A capital scheme!"

"I'll try what I can do," said old Matthew.

"One thing is certain," said Tom King. "If we are to do any good for Dick as regards effecting his freedom, we must establish some means of communication with him, and in my judgment that is the first thing that ought to be done."

"It seems very necessary."

"I think so. But how is it to be done?"

"It will be difficult."

"We might get hold of a turnkey who was friendly to Dick, and by means of bribes win him over to our interest. But the worst of it is, there is no trusting them."

"There is not. I should feel inclined to say no to that proposal at once. They would lead you on, ten to one, and at the last moment turn against you and ruin all."

"But if we discard them," said Sixteen-String Jack, "what are we to do?"

"I will tell you," replied Tom King, "and that will just bring the conversation round again to where I left off."

"What is it?"

"Do you remember the time I was in Newgate?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, didn't Dick disguise himself as a farmer, and passing himself off as my father, pay me a visit?"

"He did," replied old Matthew, "though I used every argument I could think of against it. It was all to no purpose, however—go he would."

"Certainly he did, and we had an interview together."

"Yes, but just think of the risk he ran in doing it, and what a narrow escape of capture he had."

"I know all about that; but he got off freely enough."

"By little less than a miracle."

"It doesn't matter how it was, so that he did get off."

"Well—what of it?"

"I shall just put it to all of you impartially," said Tom King, "and ask you for your decision."

"Very good."

"Not that your decision, if it goes against me, will have the slightest effect in turning me from what I intend to do."

"That's good—but go on."

"This is the point. Dick Turpin having visited me when I was a prisoner, in order to give me a chance of making my escape, do you think I ought to allow myself to be outdone by him?"

"Outdone by him?"

"Yes. Certainly not—that's your reply, of course; and if it isn't, it's mine. When I was talking to Dick about it, I said 'I am heartily obliged to you, comrade, and whenever I have the chance I will return the compliment.'"

"Do you mean visit me in my cell?" Dick asked.

"Yes," said I.

"Then you'll never have the chance."

"Why not?" I asked. "You must not be too confident. If you have escaped hitherto, it does not follow that you always should."

"I know that, Tom," he said, "but I have made a determination, and I have expressed it many a time. It is that I will never yield myself a prisoner, but fight to the last gasp, so you see, Tom, although I am much obliged to you for your offer, you will never have a chance of returning your compliment, because I shall never be in Newgate alive."

"I have heard Dick say a similar thing," said Matthew.

"And so have I," said Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

"But you see, friends," continued Tom King, "that, contrary to his expectations, he is where he made up his mind he never would be."

"That's true. We none of us know what we may come to. But now, Tom, you may as well speak out at once. I know very well what you are going to say."

"You can form a pretty good guess, no doubt."

"There should be no guess work about the matter. Come, speak up."

"Well, then, what I have firmly made up my mind to do, is to go to Newgate and pay Dick a visit."

"I knew it," said old Matthew, "I knew it."

"Well, then, my friends, now that I have announced my determination, do not try, any of you, to get up arguments against it. If you do, they will have no effect upon me, so far as making me change my determination is concerned, and they might perhaps unnerve me, for I know to the full the dangers of my undertaking."

"I hope you do."

"I am sure I do. I have thought the matter over thoroughly from first to last."

"I am sorry your mind is so firmly made up, and that you are resolved not to listen to reason, for I should have liked to have had a try at persuading you to give up the notion, but, as it is, I suppose the best thing I can do is to spare my breath."

"Quite the best thing. And now, what I want you to particularly bear in mind is, that I am not going to return the compliment, as I call it, just for the mere bravado of the thing, but I shall do a great deal of good."

Old Matthew did not speak, but shook his head.

"Listen to me," said Tom King, eager that they should be convinced by his arguments, "listen to me. You have agreed upon the necessity of communicating with Dick, now who could you find better qualified to do that than myself? I could hear all he had to say, and bring it back to you. We should then be able to agree as to what must be done."

"I am afraid the risk is too great, Tom," said Claude Duval. "You yourself have admitted how sharp a lookout they keep."

"I know."

"And, besides that," said Sixteen-String Jack, "you may depend every one who pays a visit to Dick will be very closely scrutinized indeed. Not only that, but they will have the recollection of the trick Dick played them such a short time ago, and therefore they will be doubly on the alert."

"I don't dispute that," said Tom King.

CHAPTER CCCXXV.

TOM KING RESOLVES TO DISGUISE HIMSELF IN FEMALE APPAREL, AND TO PAY A VISIT TO DICK TURPIN IN HIS CELL IN NEWGATE.

"You speak in a very confident tone, Tom," said Claude Duval, "and from that I argue that you have got some good scheme on hand, by which you think you will be able to get the better of the officials of Newgate?"

Tom nodded.

"In fact," added Sixteen-String Jack, "I recollect you said something about it."

"Did I?" said King. "Well, then, without farther preface, I'll let you know in a word or two what I intend to do."

"That's the sort," said old Matthew; "I am dying to hear it."

"Well, if you can suggest any improvement in the plan I am going to lay before you, I shall be very glad indeed, and also ready to modify it if necessary; but don't throw

cold water on it or try to make me give it up altogether."

"We won't; begin."

"I will. In the first place, then, I intend to pay Dick a personal visit in his cell. You quite understand that, don't you?"

"Quite."

"As we have every reason to believe the utmost vigilance will be exercised, therefore the necessity of disguise becomes immediately obvious. You grant that, don't you?"

"Oh! yes."

"That point being conceded, then, we pass on to the next. In consequence of the extraordinary vigilance anticipated, the disguise, if it is to be effectual, must be a most excellent one."

"There's the difficulty. You will be scrutinized too closely for any disguise to stand it."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes. With disguises you must bear this thing in mind. If there is no suspicion directed towards you, well and good, but, if people are on the look out, they will penetrate your disguise and detect you."

"Just leave that part of the question for the present, and listen to what further I have got to say. I will answer your objections presently."

"Go on, then."

"Assuming the difficulty of disguising myself to be very great, we will proceed to consider what kind of disguise would be least likely to be suspected."

"That is a point to be considered, certainly."

"It is a very important point, indeed, and one that requires the utmost consideration."

"Have you considered it?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. What disguise have you chosen?"

"A woman's apparel."

"A woman's apparel?"

"Yes. You know I am thin and slightly made, then my face is small, and my features small also. Altogether I think you will find I shall make up as a woman first-rate."

"I shouldn't wonder now," said Old Matthew, as he surveyed the lathsome form of the young highwayman, which had a decidedly feminine appearance. "I congratulate you upon your scheme. It's a good one, and ought to succeed."

"I think it will succeed. The Newgate officials may have their suspicions, but I fancy they will never fancy looking for Tom King, the highwayman, in the disguise of a woman."

"No, perhaps not."

"Now, Claude and Jack, what do you think?"

"Why, a good deal better of the scheme altogether than I have done all along."

"I am glad to hear that. And now, Matthew, I want your assistance."

"You can have it to the full extent of my power."

"I know I can."

"What is it you want to know?"

"Why, can you tell me any one who would be able to furnish me with a good disguise, or could you tell me where I could get one?"

"Well, rather."

"You can."

"Oh! I forgot for the moment. I thought you had already made the acquaintance of my old friend the costumer."

"No, I have not."

"But we have," said Claude and Jack. "He disguised us when we went to hear your trial."

"Oh! did he?"

"Yes, and what's more," said old Matthew Gale, "he disguised Turpin on the occasion when he paid a visit to you in your cell."

"Then he is very clever in his art, that's all I can say; for I didn't know Dick until he spoke."

"He is very clever. You see he has been connected with the theatre all his life, and been accustomed to dress the actors for their different parts, so you see as has acquired a kind of proficiency."

"I understand."

"You can safely leave the matter to him. If any one else attempts to deprive him of his power of recognition, he will

"I am glad to receive these assurances, because it makes my task all the lighter, and diminishes the difficulties. Now, do you think he could make me up to look like a respectable female?"

"I have not the least doubt of it. Now I come to look at you I find your appearance is decidedly feminine."

"So much the better, then."

"Tom, I don't mind telling you I have a much better opinion of your plan than I have had."

"Hurrah!"

"And upon mature consideration, I think there are some chances of its being successful."

"I think so too," said Tom. "And now the only thing I want is the approval of my comrades here."

"Will you permit me to say a word?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"A dozen, if you wish it. My desire is to hear all you can possibly say upon the subject."

"Well then, I admit, of course, that it is necessary, if we are to rescue Dick Turpin, we must open a means of communicating with him, but I am sadly afraid the officials at Newgate will keep too sharp a look-out for us to manage it."

"And then," said Claude Duval, "you must recollect who is the governor of Newgate. It is Mr. Cawthorn. He got the appointment through looking extra sharp after his prisoners, and you may depend he will try to retain it by adopting the same means, and being on the watch for every one who enters. You will have a good deal of trouble in passing him undetected."

"I can't help thinking that you magnify the danger, though you must not think that I do not place proper value upon it."

"The real fact of the matter is this," said Matthew Gale. "We don't like to run the risk of losing you, and we think the chances of our doing so are very great—that's it."

"I know it is, and I feel very grateful to you. I quite understand it. But we must think of duty. We are banded together, and one of the conditions of our union is, that we mutually aid and assist each other. Now, as for rescuing Dick, I consider it to be my especial duty to do so."

"You must be very careful."

"You may depend upon that."

"If they were to detect you, and confine you in a cell as well as Dick, we should be very awkwardly placed."

"So you would, Jack, but I will try my best to provide against such a contingency as that. And now, Matthew, what about this costumer? Where shall I find him?"

"I will find him."

"But I shall have to go to his house."

"Oh! dear no. He lives close by, in Bow-street, next door to Covent Garden Theatre."

"Will he come here?"

"Yes; in the first place to have a look at you; then he will go back to his warehouse, and return with all the articles necessary for disguising you."

"Capital. Why, when I was ready, you could call a hackney-coach to the door, and I could get into it without any one being the wiser."

"Oh! yes; you could do that."

"Come, I have better hopes than ever."

"But do not elate yourself too much. In an ordinary case I should say success was certain. Being dressed as a female, you could keep a veil down over your face, and that would prevent any one seeing your features very distinctly."

"Good again. But why shouldn't this case succeed?"

"Well, if you must know, I think you will be examined so closely that it will be impossible for you to avoid being found out."

"We must try that, and now I propose that we separate, and try to get a few hours' repose before daylight. It is no good for us to lay our plans any further until I have seen Dick, and brought back word what he says, and then we shall be able to speak decisively."

"So we shall."

"Until then speculation is useless."

"There is one thing which I should very much like to know."

"What?"

"Why, where Dick Turpin's mare, Black Bess is."

"Don't you know?"

"No; do you?"

"Of course not, but I thought, to be sure, you would know where she was."

"But I don't, and I have no more idea than you have. I often feel anxious when I think about it. It is to be hoped she is somewhere safe."

"Yes, if anything was to happen to her, I do believe Turpin would give up at once if he was to lose his mare."

"She is certainly a beautiful creature. If she was mine, I should prize her quite as much as he does."

"So should I."

"I have taken care of her many a time," said old Matthew, "and I was very fond of her."

"I should be inclined to think she was safe," said Tom King, after a pause.

"Why so?"

"Because Dick Turpin seems to have gone into the court deliberately. I mean, he had fully made up his mind what he was going to do, from which we may argue that he had calculated all the chances of his position, and come to the conclusion that there was at least a doubt about his coming out again. Such, then, being, in all probability, the case, he took care to bestow his mare, Black Bess, somewhere where she could remain in perfect security."

"That is very good reasoning," said the landlord, "and it carries conviction along with it. I have no doubt that it is just what Dick has done."

"Well, we shall know that when I see him," said Tom King, "for I will take care to make some very particular inquiries upon the subject; and when I return I will tell you all about it."

"I hope you will."

"Do not be down-hearted, Matthew; I have faith in the power of your friend to disguise me efficiently, and I have faith in my own powers to keep up the character I shall assume."

"Well, I hope you will. Of course, the great stake you have in the case will insure your being careful; and when you see Dick, be sure you ask him very particularly about the promise he made to the judge."

"I will."

"I mean as to the precise nature of it, for upon that a great deal will depend."

"Trust me for that. And now, as I said just now, let us seek a little repose, for I can assure you I feel greatly in need of it."

"I daresay you do. I am ready whenever you are."

"Stop a minute," said Claude Duval, "I have an amendment to propose."

"Speak."

"In the morning we cannot tell what may happen, and the chances are a thousand to one against our having such a good chance of consulting together as we have got now, so I propose we devote a few minutes to the consideration of a point which seems to have been entirely overlooked or disregarded."

"What is it, Claude?"

"Why, this; you cannot disguise the fact that there is, to say the least, a probability of your disguise being detected and yourself made a prisoner!"

"There certainly is a probability, but"—

"Never mind. I know what you are going to say. I think, as there is a probability, we ought to take it into our calculation, and determine what should be done in the event of your being detained a prisoner."

"And very right, too," said old Matthew. The design promises well, but it may fail. There can be no harm in making up our minds as to what we should do under the circumstances proposed."

"Certainly not," said Tom King, though, by the indifferent tone in which he spoke, it could be told that he thought it rather an unnecessary precaution.

But it was not, as events will prove.

"I think," said Claude, "we can put it in this way. If you do not return by a certain time, we may come to the conclusion that you are nabbed."

"How long will you give me?"

"Till to-morrow night. If you are not back by dark we shall make up our minds you are a prisoner."

"Very well."

"You may then depend upon us, without loss of time, setting about procuring your freedom, and taking those steps which are the likeliest to answer the end aimed at."

"Very good, but I hope to save you the trouble."

"And you can easily believe we don't want to leave it."

"Of course you don't."

"Well, gentlemen," said old Matthew, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "I think we have done all we can do, and the best thing now will be to get a good rest, in order to be equal to any fatigue which you may be put to."

"I am sure that will be the best," said Tom King.

"Then, gentlemen, as you are all so unanimous, be good enough to follow me, and I think I can promise you a good night's rest."

"I don't think Mr. Wiggles will trouble us again."

"Nor do I. You need fear nothing, however, on the score of capture."

"Why not?"

"Neither Mr. Wiggles or any one else could get into the house without my knowing of it plenty time enough to bestow you in some safe spot."

"That's a comfort, certainly, and as we have all the greatest confidence in you, we shall go to sleep without the slightest apprehension."

"You can safely do so, for I can assure you you will come to no harm under my roof while I am alive."

"I quite believe that, Matthew."

"Come this way, then," said the landlord, as he preceded them up the stairs and showed them into a comfortable sleeping apartment.

CHAPTER CCCXXVI.

TOM KING IS DETECTED IN HIS DISGUISE, AND ONCE MORE BECOMES THE TENANT OF A NEWGATE CELL.

THE night passed away without the occurrence of any event tending to disturb the three highwaymen, who therefore slept well and soundly—for such was the faith they had in the fidelity of old Matthew, and his power to shield them from any danger which presented itself, that they felt not the least apprehension.

When morning came the friendly landlord had a substantial meal laid for our friends in one of the upper rooms in the house, where they would be less likely to meet with molestation or interruption.

"I have sent for the old costumier," he said, as he came into the room after the highwaymen had dispatched their meal.

"That's right," said Tom King. "When will he be here?"

"He sent word back that he would come directly," replied Matthew, "so he is sure not to be long."

"The sooner the better. What time is it now?"

"Nearly nine."

"It is full early yet—I thought it was much later."

At this moment the faint tinkling of a bell somewhere in the lower regions of the house reached the ears of the little party.

"What does that mean?" asked Claude.

"Oh! it's all right. It means that the costumier has come; I will go down and fetch him."

Old Matthew departed, and shortly afterwards made his appearance, bringing the old costumier with him, who has already been more than once or twice introduced to the reader of this narrative.

In his usual cringing manner he made a low bow, and desired to learn the gentleman's pleasure.

Tom King informed him how he wished to be disguised, and also stated what a close scrutiny he expected would be made of it, so that he would require him to exert his utmost skill.

The old man smiled. He liked to have an opportunity of displaying the perfection to which he had brought his art, and he was quite anxious to set about his task.

He looked at Tom from head to foot, as though he would take his measure with his eye, and then he said—

"My friend Mr. Gule, the landlord, informs me that you wish me to come here and disguise you?"

Tom nodded.

"I must go back, then, to my house. I shan't be long away. I will return with all the things requisite for disguising you. I shan't be long."

With these words on his lips the old costumier left the room.

When the door had closed behind him, Tom said—

"Does he know us, Matthew?"

"I daresay he does."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Can I?"

"Of course you can."

"Then I will be responsible for him."

"That's sufficient. I want no better guarantee."

"He has only to go to Bow-street, so he won't be more than five minutes."

And he was not, for in much less time than either of our friends could have believed so old and decrepit a man could have gone the distance, he returned, bringing with him a very large bundle, which was, however, of very inconsiderable weight.

Untying this, he displayed to the gaze of our friends an assortment of female clothing.

His task now commenced.

It was a tedious one, but it will not take us long to describe it.

The female apparel was put on over that which Tom wore.

By skilful padding, his form was made to assume that of a woman's, after which a dress of very good quality, and such as any respectable woman might not be ashamed to wear, was put on over it.

When this was done, the transformation was pretty complete, but as yet the old costumier had not proceeded to the manipulations of his craft.

He first trimmed Tom's hair, cutting it rather short.

Then he took a box containing some kind of white paste or enamel, and carefully smeared it all over the highwayman's face.

The effect of this was to remove the deep brown tint which the sun of France had given to it, and it also covered from view the marks upon his chin and lip, where the hair had been shaved off.

It made, too, a greater difference in his personal appearance than any one would have thought.

Over his hair the costumier then placed a very neat wig, with curls hanging down on both sides.

Then, when he had surmounted it with a hat and feather of the kind then most in fashion, and thrown over his shoulders a shawl, a complete change was immediately effected.

His disguise was now complete.

There was a gauze veil attached to the hat, and, when this was drawn down over it, his features were nearly concealed, and so much altered that no one could have recognised them.

Claude and Jack actually clapped their hands with delight when they beheld the metamorphosis, and they had now but little doubt that Tom King would be successful in his perilous enterprise.

"I have done all that I can do," said the costumier, deferentially. "The rest will now remain with you. Mind you do not forget the part you are playing. In order for the disguise to be complete, and for it to rouse no suspicion, you must adopt a feminine gait as well as a feminine voice; and, indeed, in all respects comport yourself as a woman would."

"I will try my best," said Tom, "and I have sufficient conceit to think I shall succeed."

It was at this moment that old Matthew re-entered, having left the room while the disguising was going on in order to attend to his business.

He was really astounded at the change, and when Tom made an elaborate curtsy, as it was then the fashion for females to do, he was struck with admiration.

He had already a very high opinion of the costumier's skill, but he considered this to be his masterpiece.

Tom's slim figure was just suited to the character he had assumed.

"Then you think I shall do, Matthew?"

"I do. It all rests with yourself now, I fancy. I shall let you go with much less reluctance than I should have done."

"And I have ever confidence myself. But it is time I started."

"I will send for a hackney-coach."

"Do, at once."

Old Matthew left the room for this purpose, and then Tom bade his two friends adieu, and they repeated their instructions to each other.

This done, Tom gave the costumier a liberal recompense for his trouble.

There was a stand for hackney carriages close to the theatre, so that one was quickly at the door.

Tom King descended the stairs.

He bade the worthy landlord farewell, and thanked him for the trouble he had taken, and then entered the hackney coach.

The coachman was then directed to drive to Newgate. Off went the cumberstone, but really comfortable, vehicle at a speed of quite four miles an hour.

Tom King did not much note the length of time it took him to reach his destination.

His thoughts were busily occupied in speculating upon what he should say and do, and what would be the result of his perilous errand.

It must not for a moment be thought that Tom King was blind to the danger into which he was about to run.

He had thought the matter over, and weighed every circumstance of the occurrence of which there was the least probability, most carefully in his mind.

But he had confidence in his own powers and his own address to free him from any dangerous combination of events.

At length the carriage drew up before that door of Newgate by which visitors are admitted.

The driver got down off his seat, and, opening the door, assisted his fare to alight.

"Shall I wait, miss?" he asked.

"Yes. I shall not be long. I am only going to visit a prisoner."

"All right, miss; "you'll find me here a waiting for you."

Not forgetting that he was now a female and not a male, Tom crossed the pavement, and, ascending the steps, knocked timidly at the door of Newgate.

How strange it seemed that he, above all other men, should voluntarily have come to such a place.

But, in the course of friendship, much has been done and many perils incurred.

A bold heart, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, might well have shrunk from going so far as to do what Tom did.

The last time he passed from beneath those walls was in the hangman's cart, sitting on the coffin intended for the reception of his own body, and on his way to Tyburn.

Yet here he was again. His life still liable to the law.

The first timid summons which Tom gave was disregarded, so he repeated it, and this time a little louder than before.

The little panel in the door was dashed aside, and a man's face appeared behind the bars.

"What do you want?" he growled, for, though Mr. Cawthorn had been successful in making the jailers and turnkeys partially polite, yet, when they had a chance, they always snubbed those who applied for admission, that is, provided the governor was not at hand to hear them.

We ought to state here that the day of the week upon which Tom thus stood at the door of Newgate was Saturday.

The day, indeed, after the events we have last described as happening to Dick Turpin.

It will be remembered that it was on the Friday night when Adrian Winberry had made his abortive effort to escape, and that Dick's cell had been changed.

"What do you want?" growled the turnkey.

"To see a prisoner."

"Who?"

"One who calls himself Richard Turpin."

"Eh?"

"Yes."

"Where's your order?"

"I have none."

"Can't see him, then."

Bang shut went the wicket.

Tom's heart sunk.

This was an obstacle he had not calculated upon.

He thought he should be able to obtain an interview with the prisoner without going through the formality of presenting an order.

How was he to get one?

What magistrate would listen to his application?

He knocked again.

He felt that was the only chance he had, and determined to persevere.

The knock this time was obeyed with the utmost promptness.

The same face presented itself at the grated aperture. But so changed was it that Tom almost failed to recognise it.

He was at a loss to account for it.

There was, however, no less an alteration in his words and manner than there was in his looks.

"Oh! it's you again, miss, is it? I am very sorry, but if you haven't an order, you can't see the prisoner."

This speech astonished Tom.

But he soon arrived at the mystery, for he heard a voice say, in an authoritative tone of voice:

"What's that, Wilks?"

"If you please, sir, it's a female."

"What does she want?"

"She wants to see Dick Turpin, sir, but she hasn't got no order."

The grating had not been closed, so, standing close by as he did, Tom could hear every word of this little dialogue.

The person with the authoritative tone of voice was no other than Mr. Cawthorn, who had just made his appearance in the vestibule, and it was in consequence of this that the remarkable change took place in the demeanour of the man on the lock, as we have described.

When the governor heard Wilks say that it was a female who sought admittance to Dick Turpin, he thought it just possible that it might be one of the two ladies who had visited him on a former occasion, so he had the door opened, and gave instructions for the visitor to be admitted into the lobby.

Tom felt his heart beat strangely, and a tremor to seize upon all his limbs as the door was flung open, and he had nothing more to do than to lift up his foot and cross the threshold of the prison.

But without a perceptible hesitation, he obeyed the man on the lock and entered.

The moment he did so, Tom found himself confronted by the governor of Newgate, who he immediately recognised, because he had seen plenty of Mr. Cawthorn during his recent incarceration.

A glance assured the governor that the female who now stood before him was not either of those he had seen upon a former occasion.

Still his manners underwent no great alteration.

In a tone of great politeness he repeated the question which Wilks had asked.

Of course, Tom made the same reply.

The governor shook his head.

"You must be aware," he said, "that no one is allowed to visit the prisoner without a special order."

"Have not you any discretion in the matter?" asked Tom, who performed the part he had assumed with great perfection. "I thought the governor of Newgate would allow visitors to enter. I have only just come to London, and I am a stranger here."

Mr. Cawthorn rubbed his hands together in a disagreeable fashion.

There was an expression about his face which Tom by no means liked.

"Ha! yes. The governor has a discretion in these affairs."

"I thought so," said Tom; "and the thanks of a poor woman will be your due if you will be kind enough to allow me a few minutes' speech with the prisoner upon family matters."

"Ahem—yes. Johnson."

"Yes, sir."

"Show this lady to Turpin's cell."

CHAPTER CCCXXVII.

TOM KING'S INTERVIEW WITH DICK TURPIN IN THE NEWGATE CELL, AND ITS RESULTS.

BEYOND a doubt the governor of Newgate had some reason for thus granting the visitor's request, and what that motive was will very quickly be made apparent.

For a moment Tom felt a sickly sensation creep over his heart.

But he banished the feeling quickly.

It might be the success which had attended his endeavours made him suspicious that all was not well.

At any rate he felt a presentiment of coming danger.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AWAIT THE COMING OF THE MAIL COACH.]

He thought, however, that it might be the walls of the prison which cast this shadow over his soul.

Johnson, whom the governor had addressed, was one of the turnkeys who were lounging about, and, in obedience to the instructions of his superior, he led the way down a corridor in the direction of Turpin's cell.

As soon as Tom had disappeared, Mr. Cawthorn, with an expression which it would be hard to define, hastily left the vestibule by a different door.

He made his way through several passages, and then up a flight of steps leading to a corridor, from which several doors opened.

Here he paused a moment as if for reflection.

Then he went forward several paces and stopped before one of the doors to which we have alluded.

By his actions he seemed to wish to pass through one of them for some particular reason, but was undecided as to which would best answer his purpose.

After a brief calculation, he opened one of the doors, and passing through it, closed it quickly behind him.

For the present, however, we must not describe any more of the cunning governor's proceedings, but turn to Tom King and relate what befel him.

He walked along the corridors, then, along with Johnson, the jailer, still taking the utmost pains to keep up his character, and not to do anything apomalous to it.

In good time the door of the cell in which Turpin was confined was reached.

The ponderous fastenings were one by one removed, and finally the door itself turned slowly back upon its hinges with a disagreeable grating sound.

"A visitor," said the turnkey, gruffly, as he stood aside and allowed Tom to pass him.

The latter took care to do so without betraying any undue haste.

The cell was light, especially in comparison to the passage they had been traversing, and Tom's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom to a considerable extent, which enabled him to see every object in his companion's dungeon with perfect ease.

When Turpin heard the jailer pronounce the words, "a visitor," a wild hope sprang up in his breast that Maud Gouldman, with whom his thoughts had been busily occupied for some hours past, had come again to see him.

And this supposition was increased when he heard the rustle of female garments, which came quite plainly to his ears, for Tom was attired in a black silk dress.

On his side, Tom King was fearful that Dick would recognise him, and betray him by a sudden squintation. so he held back, and kept the veil down over his face.

The turnkey closed the door, but did not fasten it.

Strictly he should have remained in the cell, and heard all that passed between the prisoner and his visitor, but then, if he had done that, he would only have done his duty, whereas by going outside he was almost sure of having a fee of some kind.

Dick did not speak, but remained with his head bent down waiting to be addressed, for the illusion had not yet been dispelled.

Indeed, he had scarcely raised his eyes to look at the form of his visitor.

Tom was struck with surprise.

Could the humble deferential-looking being standing before him be his old comrade in many a desperate highway exploit?

"Surely no," he thought. "There is some mistake. This cannot be Dick, or else he is changed indeed."

And yet a second glance at the outlines of his form showed him that he had made no mistake, so he was forced to adopt the latter supposition.

But Tom could not bear this state of things, so in a whisper he spoke.

He was astonished, however, at the distinctness with which the faint sounds came to his ears, and, looking up, he saw that the top of the cell was circular in shape, rising, in fact, into a kind of a dome, and he attributed it to that.

"Dick," he said, "Dick—don't start—don't speak. Do you know my voice?"

It is true these words were uttered in the faintest possible tones, but Dick recognised them, as was plainly evidenced by the start he gave.

"Good heavens!" he cried aloud, in spite of Tom's injunction. "It cannot be you, and in this guise—impossible!"

"Hush, Dick, do not speak so loud. I am here under peril of my life."

"Forgive me, I will be all caution now. My surprise is over. Give me your hand, Tom. I am pleased to hold it once more in my grasp."

"That's something like yourself, Dick. Why, when I came in I am sure I did not know you. You stood there quite humbled and cast down. Whatever is the meaning of this?"

Dick smiled in a sickly sort of fashion as he said—

"Sit down, Tom, my friend, and listen to what I have got to tell you. I have a long history, and one that will much surprise you."

"Be quick and tell me, then, but don't be any longer than you can help, for I suppose they will send me away presently, and I have much to say to you myself."

"No doubt, Tom. When did you return to England?"

"Only a few days ago."

"And Claude and Jack?"

"They came with me."

"Brave hearts! I wish I was with them once again."

"And so you shall be before long. Keep your spirits up. But I don't wonder at your getting gloomy in this place; it gave me the horrors, I can tell you. But come, let us hear what you have to say."

In compliance with this request, Dick gave his old comrade a brief account of all that had happened to him since their parting at the mouth of the cavern in Scotland. With all this the reader is acquainted, so it is needless for us to repeat it here.

There was only one thing that Dick omitted, and that was to declare his passion for Maud Gouldman.

Of course he had to make mention of her, and he also set Tom's mind at ease about Black Bess by telling him where she was.

To all Tom listened with the utmost attention.

The things which had hitherto looked so strange were now clear enough, and Turpin's behaviour was no longer any mystery to him any more than it is to the reader.

In return Tom related the adventures of himself and his two comrades by sea and land, and ended with the statement that Claude and Jack were staying at the "White Horse," whither he was about to return.

"And now, Dick," he said, "the little time we have left to be with each other must be devoted to the consideration of our future proceedings. What about this promise you have made?"

"It simply amounts to this. I have promised my word that I will not make any attempt to escape from this place until I learn from the judge who showed himself so friendly disposed towards me that the efforts he is making to procure my liberation are ineffectual."

"And do you believe he is taking any steps?"

"I am sure of it, by what Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman told me when they paid me a visit."

Well, Dick, this is really about the most wonderful and romantic series of events that I can remember. But to what end? If the judge tells you he has succeeded, what shall you do?"

"Why, then all will be well."

"Perhaps. But if he fails?"

"Then I shall be released from my promise, and I shall at once set about making my escape."

"Then that's what I want to talk about, and just let me give you a word of advice. Don't let the judge keep you dallying too long, or else you will let the chance of escape pass by."

"Do not fear."

"I do fear. Judges are our enemies, and I should never think of trusting one so far as you have. Was I in your place, I should cast my promise to the winds. You have friends without the prison who are ready and willing to render you valuable aid, and you are much to blame if you neglect to avail yourself of it."

"I cannot break my word, Tom, so do not press me to do it. No one yet has ever been able to say that Dick Turpin ever broke his word after having once given it."

"I know that."

"Then don't let this prove an exception. Be content as I am to let events take their course. Ere long, I shall doubtless have an answer from the judge, and then I shall be able to decide how to act."

"But how shall I know what is his decision?"

"It will soon be known. I fancy it will give you little trouble to ascertain from some of the turnkeys."

"That can be managed; and now, suppose the judge tells you he has failed."

"Well."

"We must decide upon what we are to do. It is true, owing to my admirable disguise, I have succeeded in making my way to your cell unsuspected, but the second time I might not be so lucky."

"I should be very sorry for you to run the risk a second time. If you will recollect, when I came to see you, I got into the prison all right. It was the getting out that was the difficulty. If it had not been for the pistols I had secreted in my pocket, and which escaped their search, I don't know what I should have done."

"It is to be hoped I shall be luckier than you. I don't think any suspicion is aroused at present."

"You must be careful, Tom. Mr. Cawthorn is rather a cunning man, and he might, perhaps, find you out."

"Never mind that. I shall have to go directly. Now, Dick, look here, we will make this arrangement."

"Go on. I am listening."

"Come closer, for fear the turnkeys should overhear us. I will take care to learn the result of what the judge communicates to you, and when he communicates it. On the following night you must do your best to work your way out, and, in the meantime, we will think of the best means of aiding you."

"All right."

"That is agreed between us?"

"You may consider it so."

"Very good; and now, Dick, don't you suffer yourself to be bamboozled by this judge, and put you off to the last minute. If you must know just what I think, he has not, in my opinion, the remotest chance of success."

"Why not? I believe he is a man of great influence."

"That may be, but the fact of the matter is, you have set the authorities at defiance for a long time, and done more desperate deeds than half-a-dozen other men. For this reason I think you have no chance of pardon."

"Don't look on the gloomy side of things, Tom."
 "Your imprisonment has done you no good, Dick."
 "Why?"

"It has taken away to a very great extent that energy and self-reliance for which at one time you were so remarkable. You should not have listened to the words of the judge, no matter how softly they were spoken. Had you thrown yourself upon the protection of the mob, you would, ten to one, have got out safely, and with very little trouble."

"It's no good to talk about the past, Tom, not a bit. What is done can't be undone. Here I am, with my word pledged, and here I shall remain until I am released from it."

"Can't altogether blame you for that; the only misfortune is that you should have made such a promise."
 "But we understand each other, do we not?"

"I think so."

"Time's up long ago," said Johnson, the jailer, putting his head into the cell.

"All right," replied Tom. "One moment, and I will be with you."

The jailer retired.

"Now, Dick, I must bid you good-bye; but it won't be long, I hope, before I see you mounted on your bonny mare in company with us once again. When you came to see me while a prisoner here, I told you I would return the compliment, and, in spite of your confident assurances to the contrary, I have done so."

"You are a true friend, Tom," said Turpin, grasping his hand—"a true friend. My confinement here does seem to affect my spirits, but when I mount, a gallop in the fresh air will dissipate all that gloom, and I shall be myself again."

"I trust so."

"Oh! I shall be right again when I am free from this place, and something like an inward conviction sustains me and assures me that I shall be free, and that we shall have yet many a glorious adventure together which will by far surpass all that we have ever done."

"Spoken like yourself, Dick. I shall be able to carry back a good account of you to Claude, and Jack, and old Matthew."

"I quite understand all your instructions, Tom, and shall trust to you to find out when the judge has his interview with me, and act accordingly."

"You can trust me fully, and perhaps some remark may be found by which we can communicate with each other; at all events, we will do so should anything occur of a different nature to what we expect."

"Very well."

"Good-bye, Dick, then; good-bye; and ere long I trust to grasp your hand with nothing above us but the sky."

"Good-bye, Tom; and believe me, I heartily echo your wish, for I am sick of this place."

"I daresay you are. Once more, good-bye. Here is the turnkey."

Johnson entered at this moment, and Tom, after once more pressing Dick's hand within his own, hastily left the cell and followed his guide along the passages to the vestibule of the prison, where a slight surprise awaited him.

CHAPTER CCCXXVIII.

M^R. CAWTHORN HAS TOM KING CONFINED IN A CELL, AND TAKES SOME VERY GOOD PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT HIS ESCAPE.

We must now return to the proceedings of Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate, and furnish a clue to his mysterious behaviour.

When he closed the door behind him in the manner we have described, he was surrounded by the most intense darkness.

The governor, however, did not take any means to procure a light, from which it may be inferred that he did not need one.

He lowered himself on to the floor of the apartment, if such it was, and commenced groping his way along it, making in his progress a scarcely audible sound.

At length he paused.

He had then reached the centre of the chamber,

When we describe the position of this chamber, the reader will have a suspicion of what is about to follow. It was immediately over the cell occupied by Turpin.

The cell into which our hero had been placed after his adventure with Adrian Winberry, was one of a series which had been constructed in a peculiar manner for a certain purpose, though it was very rarely, from some cause or other, that they were made use of in the manner their projector intended.

It will be recollected that when Tom King entered his old comrade's dungeon, he spoke in a whisper, and was astonished at the loudness with which it sounded.

Then glancing up at the ceiling of the cell, he attributed the effects produced to its dome-like shape, and in this he was perfectly correct, as such a construction magnifies the sound in the same manner that a convex lens will magnify all objects seen through it.

But further than this Tom did not go.

The idea never for one moment struck him that the cells were built in that shape for the sole reason of making faint sounds audible, and still less did he imagine that in the ceiling there was a small aperture communicating with a chamber exactly overhead, and through which sounds were transmitted as through a speaking-trumpet.

Yet such was actually the case.

The contrivance was an ingenious one, and the end for which it was devised requires no explanation.

There is no longer any mystery with respect to Mr. Cawthorn's conduct.

Acquainted with all which we have just set before the reader, he resolved to set at rest those suspicions which sprang up in his mind when Tom applied for admission.

Likely enough, he thought, his suspicions were utterly without foundation, but then he had an easy means of satisfying himself upon that head.

He resolved to do so.

His hesitation upon reaching the corridor was caused by the uncertainty he felt as to which of the doors would take him into the chamber over Dick's dungeon.

By counting the doors, however, he arrived definitely at this piece of information.

Lying down, then, at full length upon the floor, Mr. Cawthorn placed his ear over the orifice in the topmost portion of the dome and listened.

In this position every word which was uttered by the two highwaymen reached his ears with the utmost plainness, and the intelligence he thus learned was important indeed.

The seeming female, who had come to see Turpin, was no other than the almost equally notorious highwayman, Tom King.

Tom King, who had once been in his hands, but who had cheated the gallows in a most surprising manner.

Of this he had no doubt.

"A capital invention this," he muttered, mentally.

"They little think I am hearing every word they speak as plain or even plainer than they can themselves. An excellent invention, truly!"

The governor was quite pleased with it, because it answered his purpose.

But there are few, we think, who would altogether approve of it, though, for some reasons, they might be disposed to do so.

It seems treacherous, and anything savouring of treachery is repugnant to the feelings of a true Englishman.

It was quite certain our two friends spoke to each other under the impression that there was no one at hand to overhear them.

When the conference was over, Mr. Cawthorn rose from his recumbent position, and made his way out of the little chamber, again closing the door behind him with the same silence as before.

Then, bending his steps direct to the vestibule of the prison, he stood not far from the man on the lock.

There were two or three turnkeys besides, sitting on a bench, which was provided for their accommodation.

A quizzical kind of look was on Mr. Cawthorn's face, as, standing in his favourite attitude, with his hands clasped behind his back, he looked in the direction which Tom King was to come.

The men knew that something was about to happen, but they could not tell what.

However, they kept themselves on the alert. Mr. Cawthorn had not to stand long. The sound of footsteps could be heard in the corridor leading to the cells.

Now, Tom King was under the conviction that his enterprise had been successful to a degree, and he consequently felt the greatest confidence in his disguise.

To be sure, there was the danger of leaving, but he considered that as little or nothing.

As for the turnkey, Johnson, who had so considerably kept out of the way, and allowed them to have their talk to themselves, Tom thought he deserved some recompense.

Accordingly, as they came together along the passage, the disguised highwayman took an opportunity to slip a liberal gratuity into his palm, and an immense amount of deference and respect was the result.

Alas! Tom King had no presentiment even of what was about to happen.

Everything was going on in a most satisfactory manner.

At length, the door which separated the corridor from the vestibule was reached, and Johnson, taking a ponderous key from his girdle, thrust it into the lock and opened it.

Tom gave a hasty glance into the vestibule.

At first he could not see the governor.

A projection of the masonry hid him.

Straight in front was the half-door leading out into the street.

No sooner, however, did Tom emerge from the corridor and fairly stand within the vestibule, than he caught sight of Mr. Cawthorn, and the glimpse he got at his face was anything but assuring.

With his hands behind his back, and in an attitude of great affected cleverness—his face screwed up into an expression of comical derision—the governor of Newgate peered into the countenance of Tom King.

Gladly would our friend have passed him without saying a word, and he made an attempt to do so, but it failed.

Mr. Cawthorn did not intend him to pass.

He planted himself exactly in his path.

"Ahem!" he said.

Then for the first time the thought darted through Tom's mind that he had been discovered, and he gave a despairing look at the outer door.

"Eech your friend, I suppose, eh?" continued the governor.

"Yes, sir, I thank you," replied Tom, commanding his voice as well as he was able. "I am very much obliged to you for your kindness."

"In-deed!"

Mr. Cawthorn swayed gently backwards and forwards on his toes and heels.

"Yes sir, and I can only say again, that my best thanks are your due."

"Ahem. Yes. It's really quite pleasant to be in a position to render you a service which affords you so much satisfaction. Ahem!"

"No doubt," said Tom, whose heart misgave him more and more.

He feared that he had rashly ventured into the lion's den, and that it would be no easy matter to leave it unscathed.

But what could he do?

Mr. Cawthorn stood exactly between him and the outer door.

To attempt to rush past him and endeavour to get into the street by main force was quite out of the question, and he felt it was so.

The man on the lock, too, and the other turnkeys gathered round the governor, and looked on curiously.

His behaviour was so extraordinary.

They all knew it portended something.

"Well," continued Mr. Cawthorn, "I suppose you found your friend all right and properly attended to."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! What relation did you say you were to the prisoner?"

Tom did not recollect mentioning the relationship, but still he said—

"Oh! cousin, eh? That's another form of sweetheart, I suppose, eh?"

Tom made no reply.

"We omitted one little ceremony," continued the governor, "but it is not too late to remedy the omission. Hicks and Moges!"

"Yes, sir," replied two of the turnkeys.

"Just take hold of that lady for a moment."

The men darted forward, and took a firm grasp of Tom's arms.

Possibly he might have shook them off, and yet he did not want to disclose his secret.

It was quite time when he was found out.

Tom resolved to keep up the character of a female—at any rate for a little longer.

"Hicks," said the governor, addressing the turnkey on Tom's right hand

"Yes, sir."

"Take off the lady's hat."

This command was rather roughly obeyed, for Hicks took hold of the hat by the brim, and pulled it with some violence off Tom's head.

Then the governor pretended to discover what he all along knew very well.

"Ha!" he said, when Tom's features were fully exposed to his view. "Hold him tight. Help, here. Just what I thought. That is Tom King, the highwayman!"

Not one of the turnkeys had expected this announcement, and they were astonished accordingly.

But, being in the habit of having surprises, they had a knack of quickly recovering themselves, and, in less than a moment, Tom found himself surrounded by a number of men, everyone of whom took hold of him somewhere or other.

In spite of the odds against him, however, Tom made a desperate effort to recover his liberty.

He struggled and fought with all the insensate fury of a madman.

He knew the result of his struggles.

Not only his liberty but his life depended upon his getting free, for, of course, having been already condemned, the first opportunity would have been taken of carrying the sentence into effect.

The man on the lock joined the fray.

The key of the outer door was in his pocket, so he was quite sure the prisoner could not escape.

The racket was prodigious, and, in a very little while, the whole of the prison was roused.

From the corridors leading to the different ranges of cells turnkeys poured forth, while passers by in the street, hearing the uproar, ascended the stone steps without in a dense crowd, and effectually choked up the entrance.

No weapons, save those with which Nature had provided them, were used.

Tom had pistols about his person, but up to the present he had not succeeded in getting his hands at liberty for a sufficiently long period of time to draw them.

As for the turnkeys, their sole object was to secure him—he was already a prisoner—but they found the task of slipping handcuffs on a very difficult one to accomplish.

In the struggle, the voluminous female apparel with which he had been clothed was torn away, until, at length, not a shred remained, and then Tom was exposed in his ordinary dress—for it will be remembered the costumier put on the female apparel over his clothes.

He was now readily recognised, for the wig had been one of the first things to disappear.

Tom felt that he cut a rather ludicrous figure, and was enraged accordingly.

Notwithstanding all his efforts, however, he was in the end overpowered by numbers.

But he did not give in while he had strength left to resist.

At length one of the officers, more dexterous than the rest, slipped on a pair of handcuffs.

Resistance was then entirely at an end.

Still keeping their hold of him, the men stood aside, and permitted the governor to have a glimpse at his prisoner.

There could now be no doubt whatever about Tom King's identity, though Mr. Cawthorn was made quite certain on the point by what he had overheard.

"So this is your trick?" he said, sneeringly; "and a pretty one it is. The idea to dress up in women's petticoats. Ha! ha!"

"Ha—ha!" laughed the turnkeys in chorus, as though it was the funniest thing in the world.

They always laughed when the governor did.

"Well, you have done a good thing for yourself, Mr. King. Really Newgate is quite honoured. Dick Turpin and Tom King both under its roof at once! I'll declare it will be a thousand pities if you and not both tacked up at Tyburn together. Hal ha!"

"Hal ha!" laughed the turnkeys again.

"You ain't quite sharp enough, Mr. King. Do you think I was going to be taken in by such a shallow device as that? Pah! Well, here you are, and here you will remain, for I will take care there are no escapes made from the prison while I am governor of it. Secure him well, my men. He is a desperate character, truly. Take care of him, and if he escapes you shall every one of you suffer for it."

"Shall we try some irons, sir?"

"No, never mind irons. What's the good of irons? Put him in a cell, and watch he don't come out of it."

This was very good advice of the governor's, so far as the detention of a prisoner was concerned—the means proposed were far better than trusting to bolts and bars.

CHAPTER CCCXXIX.

JUDGE HOLLYOAK COMMUNICATES TO DICK TURPIN THE UNSUCCESSFUL RESULT OF HIS ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN HIS PARDON.

The turnkey who had so officiously proposed hampering Tom's limbs with fetters, shrunk back when he saw that his proposal was not relished.

In obedience to the orders of the governor, the prisoner was dragged to one of the cells.

We say "dragged," because Tom King did all he could to impede the progress of his jailers.

But his resistance was overpowered, and he was gradually forced along the passage.

At length a door was reached, which Mr. Cawthorn doubtless considered would answer the purpose he required of it.

It was opened, and a strong-looking stone cell was disclosed.

Into this Tom was hustled rather roughly, and the door was closed upon him.

The rage of our friend was so great that it almost threw him into a fit of madness.

To think he should have succeeded in his designs, as far as he did, and then at the last moment to be balked by the extra cleverness of the governor.

The reader must bear in mind that Tom had no idea how it was the governor had penetrated his disguise.

He was, however, now left to his own reflections and speculations upon the matter.

His first ebullition of rage and passion died away, and then he began to think more calmly of his position.

While doing so, he, at some pains, removed from his person all the fragments which remained of the female apparel he had worn.

When this task was completed he felt rather more at home with himself, and he seated himself upon the bench, which apparently was to serve him for chair, table, and bed.

"This is awkward," he said to himself; "most awkward. How am I to communicate with Claude and Jack? Curses on it all! nothing would be more provoking. Then there's myself. I am by no means comfortably circumstanced. Let me see. To-day is Saturday; they will have some hanging on Monday, and if I am here I shall be included among the number. I must escape. But how? Confound that Cawthorn! there's no such thing as getting the better of him. How did he find out my disguise?"

In such reflections as these did Tom occupy himself with continually the same result.

He was driven every time to the same conclusion—the only and inevitable conclusion.

He must escape.

As for Mr. Cawthorn himself, it would scarcely be possible to find in all England a man more content and satisfied with himself than he was.

Dick Turpin, the most famous highwayman in the world, was in his custody.

Now he had captured that famous highwayman's comrade, under such circumstances as would ever redound to his credit.

He considered his reputation established.

No pains or trouble should be spared by him, he determined, to keep his slippery guests safe under lock and key.

"I shall have him tacked up on Monday," he said to himself, "along with Adrian Winberry, and Norman, and are. Capital. I could not be blamed for Tom King's former escape, but, if there was the least blame attached to me, it would be quite removed by my recapture of him. Ha! ha! I shall have a pension yet."

And so, while Tom King fretted and fumed, Mr. Cawthorn congratulated himself upon the aspect of affairs.

It was not long before Dick Turpin was made acquainted with what had taken place.

His regret was exceedingly great, because he knew the immense peril in which Tom stood.

Beyond a doubt he would be executed off hand.

This was serious, because Dick could not help considering himself to a certain extent the cause of his death.

From his place of espial overhead, Mr. Cawthorn had not heard a word uttered about tools, nor did he think for a moment that Dick had been furnished with any.

But it was a point upon which he resolved to be quite sure, and to have no doubts upon whatever.

Accordingly, accompanied by several turnkeys, he made his way to Dick Turpin's cell.

He had him carefully searched from head to foot, so that nothing whatever could be concealed about his person without inevitable discovery.

Being quite assured upon that point, he did not search the cell, as being a needless labour, but quietly had Dick removed to another, so that, if he had secreted anything in it, it would cease to be of any value to him.

Nothing, however, had been given to Dick, so the governor went to all this extra trouble for nothing.

Turpin learned that Dick had been confined in one of the strongest cells in the prison, and that Mr. Cawthorn had given express instructions for him to be well watched over.

The jailers who were friendly to Dick communicated this and other intelligence.

That memorable Saturday was an anxious day for Dick Turpin.

He repented now over and over again that he had passed his word not to attempt to escape.

Indeed, he almost felt inclined now to break it, although it was given.

He wished to achieve the rescue of Tom King.

And, unless he was very quick in his movements, he would be too late.

Hanging day, as Monday was always called, was close at hand, and, if Tom did not escape before then, it would be all over with him.

For himself, however, it was somewhat different.

He had yet to be put upon his trial, so that some time must intervene, at any rate, before his execution could take place.

There was no such formality in the case of Tom King.

Well, then (knowing as we do the friendship which subsisted between them), might Dick Turpin feel anxious and alarmed.

The affair was a most unfortunate one, let it be viewed in what light it might.

In this way the day passed wearily away.

It was growing dusk when Dick Turpin, as he sat in his cell, heard the sounds of voices and footsteps in the corridor without.

They passed before his own door.

The ponderous fastenings were removed, and then it swung open with a creaking sound.

"A visitor," said the turnkey.

As the man spoke, an elderly gentleman, dressed in black, stepped into the cell.

At first sight, owing to the darkness in the place, Dick did not recognise his visitor, but a second glance showed it to be Mr. Hollyoak, the judge who had presided at the trial of Adrian Winberry.

Dick rose and made a profound bow as soon as he found who his visitor was, and waited for him to speak.

With the manner of one who has a disagreeable duty to perform, and who wishes to get through it as quickly as possible, the judge addressed him—

"I need scarcely tell you the motive of this visit to you, since you must know it well already."

"I do know it," said Dick. "It is to communicate to me the result of the exertions which you have made in my behalf."

"Just so."

"And are you in a position to do so?"

"I will tell you in a few words. I set about performing the promise I made to you, and by a proper representation of the case, succeeded in interesting a great many people in your favour."

Dick bowed.

The judge continued.

"Having done this, I had a petition drawn up, setting forth the whole case, and proceeded to get signatures for it. The first were those of Blanche Winberry and Maud Gouldman, two very near relatives of the deceased."

"And did they sign?"

"They headed the list. I then proceeded to get other names, and when I found I could obtain no more, I forwarded the petition in the proper quarter."

"I am much beholden to you, sir," said Dick. "But have you yet had any reply with reference to this petition?"

"I have."

"And that reply?"

"Is simply this. All that is stated there shall be borne in mind at your trial, and it will serve to obtain, most likely, some commutation of your sentence."

"And is this all you have been able to effect?"

"You speak in a tone of disappointment, but I don't wonder at it. My own expectations were much higher, I confess, but I have been able to accomplish no more."

"I am much obliged to you for what you have done, sir," said Dick; "but will you grant me one request?"

"What is it?"

"Release me from the promise I made you."

"Not to attempt to make your escape?"

"Yes, sir."

"Should you keep your promise until I did?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I release you."

"Many thanks, sir, for that, and all that you have done for me besides."

"And now, tell me. Do you think there is any prospect of making your escape?"

"I shall try."

"That is not exactly an answer."

"I am aware it is not."

"Then, you think there is a chance?"

"I do."

"I beg to differ from you there. So many precautions have been taken that it will be an impossibility."

Turpin smiled.

"I have not moved hand or foot since I have been here, though I have had plenty of good chances of escaping. Now, however, that I am released from my promise, the case will be different."

"We shall see."

"We shall, sir."

"I am heartily sorry I have not been able to do more good for you than I have. Still I have tried my best. I think if the matter goes to trial the petition will not have much effect with the judge and jury men."

"I am of the same opinion, sir."

"I think, considering the manner in which you came forward, the authorities ought to have allowed you one more chance for your life."

"That was all I wanted, sir."

"I know that was all you asked for."

"I hope, sir," said Dick, "you will allow me to say how very grateful I feel for all the trouble you have taken."

"Pho—pho. Do not mention that."

"Should I come to trial, I hope I shall have the good fortune to appear before you."

"I hope not; because if you were I should do my duty strictly and impartially, which in this case would be very painful."

Dick liked the judge all the better for this candid acknowledgment.

A few words of no importance or interest to the reader passed between them, and then the judge withdrew.

When the dock closed behind him Turpin rose to his full height, and said—

"Now I am free, and master of my own actions. To my friend, it will go hard with me if, ere long, you do it."

find a change in your position and prospects. I must think—I must think."

He paced the cell hurriedly as he spoke, and strove to hit upon some scheme which afforded some reasonable prospect of success.

For a long time he was unsuccessful.

Night came and found him with the problem still unsolved.

Many difficulties were in the way.

Dick wanted, not only to escape from Newgate, but to take his comrade with him.

He had, however, not the least idea where his cell was situated.

Nor did there appear any ready means by which he could find out.

When the turnkeys came with the supper, they found the "captain," as they always called him, in a not very amiable frame of mind, and so they were wise enough to leave him to himself.

Any other night the time would have lagged, and every minute seemed prolonged into an hour.

Now, however, when so much was at stake, the hours flew by like minutes.

The rapid flight of time chafed Dick terribly.

Every moment was, as he well knew, of the most vital importance.

But, nevertheless, the night was wasted in indecision, and Sunday morning came and found him as far off the result as ever.

He never slept a moment all the night.

In the morning he looked pale and haggard, and his eyes were bloodshot.

There remained now only twenty-four hours, and, if something was not done by Tom King during that time, he must inevitably perish.

It was this which weighed, too, heavily upon Dick's mind, and prevented him thinking so clearly as he would have done.

He was over anxious, and the feeling defeated its own object.

Then, as now, it was the practice to take all the prisoners to church on the Sunday morning, for which purpose a chapel is provided in the building.

Here, at least, Dick thought he should be able to obtain a glimpse of his old comrade, if nothing more.

Perhaps he should be able to learn some important information.

At length the time for service arrived, and, according to custom, Dick, as well as the rest, were marshalled into the chapel.

For a long time Dick could not see Tom, for the prison just then was rather full of tenants.

Presently, however, he saw him.

Tom was looking round him anxiously, doubtless for the same reason as himself.

Dick kept his gaze steadily fixed upon him, and at length their eyes met.

A glance of intelligence was exchanged between them, but that was all.

After service they were taken back to their cells, and Dick was no nearer his object than before.

CHAPTER CCCXXX.

OLD MATTHEW AND THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN HOLD AN ANXIOUS CONSULTATION RESPECTING THE FATE OF TOM KING.

So remarkable an occurrence as the capture of Tom King in the manner we have recorded soon spread with amazing swiftness over the whole city of London, and before the Saturday night had come, there were few who had not heard some exaggerated version or other.

Amongst the first who learned what had taken place was Matthew Gale, the landlord of the "White Horse," in Drury-lane.

Somehow he was scarcely surprised at the intelligence. Ever since Tom had taken his departure in the hackney coach, the heart of the worthy landlord had been haunted with a vague presentiment of coming danger.

The feeling was one which could not be shook off. Indeed it seemed all the efforts which he made to the end only tended to increase it.

The news of Tom's capture was only the realization of his forebodings.

As soon as he ascertained the particulars, he hastened upstairs to the room in which Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were confined, and communicated all to them.

The concern of the two highwaymen, who had the warmest possible admiration for Tom King, was extreme. Unlike old Matthew, they refused to give credence to the tale, and insisted upon his obtaining some verification of what he had stated.

This he had no objection to doing, if merely to satisfy himself.

"I will go," he said. "It will be less dangerous for me to do so than to confide the mission to any one else."

"You will run no great risk," said Claude; "all you will have to do will be to conduct your inquiries cautiously."

"Trust me for that," said old Matthew. "I won't be any longer away than I can help, and when I return you can rely upon my bringing you full and correct information."

"I know we can."

"You will start at once?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Without a moment's delay."

"That is well. Pray go at once. We shall be anxious when you come back."

"I am off, and I will be back as quickly as I can. While I am away, be sure you stay where you are; don't show yourselves upon any account, and then I don't think you will have anything to fear."

"All right, Matthew."

"I am off, then."

The worthy landlord, who certainly never looked at his trouble when he was serving our friends, left the room, and set out for Newgate.

As the distance from his house to the prison was not great he determined to go on foot.

One reason that influenced him in this was the thought that he might be able to pick up some information on the road.

He made several inquiries, and entered into brief conversation with many persons, but without his eliciting in either case more than he knew already.

The story of Tom's capture was repeated to him with very few alterations or variations, and this went a long way towards convincing him that it must be somewhere near the truth, or they would not agree so well as they did.

At length the prison was reached.

Old Matthew looked up at the black and gloomy structure, and very wisely at the little door through which visitors passed on their way into the prison.

From the man on the lock he knew every information could be obtained, but that surly official would never have communicated it to him.

Old Matthew was thrown upon his own resources to learn what he wished to know.

As on other occasions he was not at fault.

He had partly made up his mind what to do.

In the first place he went to the pie-shop on that side of the Old Bailey which faces the prison, and saw his friend Coles.

The reader will remember Coles.

He was the man who, at old Matthew's request, had so cunningly secreted the spring saws in the crust of one of his pies.

He was to be trusted.

Here Matthew thought he was sure of getting every information, for the jailers and other prison officials were continually coming or sending over for pies, and Coles was frequently sending for dishes after the pies had been eaten.

Nor was old Matthew disappointed in his expectation.

Coles was very glad to see him and pressed him to stay, but Matthew told him how urgent the business was upon which he had come.

Nevertheless, the subject was not broached until old Matthew sat down in the little room behind the shop.

"Now, Matthew," said Coles, as he closed the door.

"Speak freely, and let me hear what you want."

"I will, Coles."

"Go on, then."

"Something rather extraordinary took place over the way this morning, didn't there?"

"At Newgate?"

"Yes."

"I believe you, why?"

"Stop a moment, my friend; I want you to be good enough to give me all the particulars you are acquainted with without any embellishments of your own."

"As for particulars," said Coles, "I can't say that I know many of them, but, if the main facts of the case will do, I can supply you with them."

"Those are just what I want to know."

"Well, then, by all I can learn, it appears that this morning Tom King, the highwayman, disguised as a very respectable young woman, called at Newgate and asked to see Dick Turpin, who is confined in one of the cells, and waiting for his trial."

"Yes—yes."

"At first no suspicions were excited, and the seeming young woman was allowed to go into the cell."

"He did have an interview with Dick, then?"

"Tom King?"

"Yes."

"I believe so, for after he had been to the cell he came along the passage and was going to be let out, when who should be standing in the lobby but Mr. Cawthorn!"

"That's the governor?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"Fill up your glass again."

Old Matthew did so.

Then he nodded to his friend to continue.

"The governor must have had some suspicions—though what they exactly were perhaps no one knows but himself. However, he had the female apparel pulled off, and there stood Tom King in his own clothes."

"What next?" asked old Matthew, eagerly, for the reader can believe he felt a more than common interest in what he said.

"Tom King, when he discovered he was found out, made a desperate resistance. He had no arms, or, at all events, did not make use of any, and in the end he was, as you may think, completely overpowered by numbers, and carried to a cell; but I believe he struggled and fought to the very last."

"And that has really happened?"

"Oh! beyond all question. I will vouch for the other part."

"How?"

"Why, I heard a tremendous uproar, and could see something curious was going on, for I stood at my shop door at the time, so I ran across the road and peeped over the top of the wicket."

"What did you see?"

"Why, Tom King, sure enough, fighting the jailers—there was a dozen of them at least—like the very devil!"

"You knew him?"

"In a moment."

"And you saw him carried off to a cell?"

"Yes."

"That is enough, then. I suppose you have nothing more to tell me."

"Nothing certain, but I'll tell you what Johnson the turnkey, said when he was in the shop about half-an-hour ago."

"What?"

"Why, that on Monday Adrian Winberry and his two accomplices are to be executed for murder at Tyburn, and that Tom King is going with them."

Old Matthew sprang to his feet.

"Tom King?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"Going with them?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"It's true, if it is."

"But how can they execute him so soon?"

"Well, I asked Johnson that question."

"And what did he say?"

"That the reason was this: Tom King has already been tried, cast for death, and the warrant sent to the prison for his execution."

"Yes."

"Well, that warrant was never carried out. He was taken to Tyburn, and escaped by a hair's-breadth."

"Yes—yes."

"Consequently the warrant against him remains in full force, and they are determined it shall be carried out as quickly as possible, and they will take such precautions with respect to a guard of military, that a rescue will be impossible."

"Indeed."

"To-day is Saturday, you know, and Monday being so close, the authorities think Tom will not have such a good chance of escape as he would if it was put off for another week."

"I see. Coles, my friend, I am much obliged to you. The information you have given me is important—indeed, very important."

"Fill your glass again."

"No, I thank you. I have just emptied it because I must be off. I can't stay a moment longer."

"I can guess."

"What?"

"What you are going to do."

"Well, if you can, keep it to yourself, for any revelations would spoil all."

"You can trust me, Matthew. I wouldn't say a word for the world."

"I know that, Coles. I may want your services. I can't tell, but, in the event of my doing so——"

"You can have them."

"That's right. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Old Matthew shook hands with Coles, and then made the best of his way back to the "White Horse."

The intelligence he brought with him was important indeed.

Not only was it confirmatory of all that he had before heard, but he had gleaned some additional particulars, which were of the greatest importance.

He found all at the house just as he left it.

There had been no disturbance.

No alarm.

No attack by the police.

Claude and Jack waited very impatiently for Matthew to return.

To them he seemed to be absent an endless time.

At length they heard him ascending the stairs.

They ran to the door and opened it.

As soon as they caught sight of his face that was enough. They had no need to ask whether what they heard was true.

Nevertheless, they did put the question.

In a voice of great concern, Matthew told them all that he had heard from his friend Coles, and, as he proceeded, the faces of the two highwaymen assumed quite as grave an expression as his.

"This is indeed most serious," said Claude Duval. "We shall have to be very speedy in our movements, or he will perish."

"He will."

"I had no idea," remarked Sixteen-String Jack, "that he was in so much danger; but I might have known it if I had given the subject a moment's thought."

"He has not time to make an escape," cried Claude. "What is to be done?"

"Affairs have assumed a very serious aspect," said old Matthew—"a very serious aspect; and, frankly speaking, I have no idea what would be the best thing for us to do."

"Nor I."

"But," said Sixteen-String Jack, "we must not allow him to perish."

"Not if we can prevent it."

"But we must prevent it."

"How?"

"I cannot answer that question."

"Nor I," said Claude.

"But we must reflect," said Sixteen-String Jack. "There is a little time between now and nightfall; let us all three occupy it by thinking the matter over and considering it in our minds."

"Agreed."

"Surely between us we shall think of something!"

"It is a very ugly affair altogether," said Matthew. "You see, we had quite enough to do to think how we should get Dick Turpin out of his difficulty, and we wanted Tom to help us to do that."

"And now he is the worst off of the two."

"Decidedly."

"But if an old comrade is in ever such great danger we will not desert him. Never mind the risk. We can but save, or perish with him."

"Let us do the former."

"With all my heart."

"Come—come," said Sixteen-String Jack, "all this discussion leads to nothing, and wastes valuable time besides. Keep quiet, and let us think of something."

"I must leave you," said old Matthew; "the business below requires my attention, and if I am too long absent from it, suspicion may be awakened."

"Take care of it."

"I will, you may be assured. I will, however, come back as soon as it is dusk, and that will be in about an hour's time, I fancy."

"About that."

"Very well, then. I will think the matter over in the bar, and do you talk it over the while between yourselves up here."

"We will."

Old Matthew went downstairs, and kept his word.

Jack and Claude occupied the hour he was absent in proposing a thousand schemes by which the liberation of Tom King could be effected, but they were rejected one after the other as being unsuitable.

And so the time wore on until the shadows of evening crept into the room in which they sat.

Then came the sounds of old Matthew's feet as he slowly ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER CCCXXXI.

A DESPERATE PLOT IS HATCHED BETWEEN THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN AND THE LANDLORD TO EFFECT THE LIBERATION OF DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING FROM NEWGATE.

WHEN old Matthew opened the door and entered the apartment, our friends saw he carried a lighted candle in his hand.

It was not quite dark enough for one to be absolutely needed, but still the gloom in the room and the gloom in their minds made a light look cheerful and pleasant.

Without a word being spoken by either of them, Matthew closed the door behind him, put the candle on the mantelpiece, and sat down. He looked inquiringly into the faces of the two highwaymen, and then spoke:

"You look very dull and glumish," he said. "What's the matter? Can't you make up your minds as to what is the best thing to be done to save Tom King from Tyburn Tree on Monday morning?"

"No, Matthew, we can't; and that's just the fact of the matter."

"Nor can I."

"Oh! you can."

"I can't."

"I have faith in your powers."

"Then don't have too much faith."

"But you have thought of something."

"No, I have not."

"Not of anything?"

"Of nothing that promises the least chance of success."

"How unfortunate!"

"And you have not?"

"No. We have discussed a thousand different plans, but we have discarded them all as being unsuitable."

"I'll tell you how it is," said old Matthew. "We are over anxious, that's the reason we can't think of something. Now, we ought to get quite cool, and talk over the matter quietly, striving not to think of Tom's great danger, and the little time we have got to get him out of it."

"Very true, Matthew; but the difficulty lies in forgetting that and keeping ourselves cool."

"I know it does; but if you will take my advice, you will fill your pipes, and have a smoke, and I will do the same. There is nothing like a smoke, in my opinion, to calm your mind."

"Well, we will try your remedy, Matthew."

"Do."

Pipes were reached and lighted, and after a few whiffs the conversation recommenced.

"How do you feel?" asked old Matthew, anxious that this remedy should be approved of; "are you calm?"



[THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THE HIGHWAYMEN AND THE MOUNTED PATROL.]

"I think so."

"Try a few more whiffs."

Our friends did so, and then the landlord broke out into the following remark—

"You may depend the only way we shall do Dick and Tom any good will be by making a very bold stroke."

"How?"

"I don't know how, but you may take my word for it that only some desperate scheme, and such as no one would think of doing from its very daring, will succeed."

"I see."

"You understand me?"

"Quite, so far as your remarks go."

"Exactly; what now remains is to devise some very bold and daring scheme, and put it into execution."

"Very true. But there are a great many difficulties in the way."

"I know that. But they will never be overcome if you do not resolutely attack them."

"But, Matthew, having advanced so far as you have

with your propositions, can't you tell us something that will enable us to achieve our purpose?"

Matthew shook his head.

"Are you sure?"

"I can't just at present, and yet, stop. I have an idea."

"What is it? Let us hear it."

"You will laugh at me."

"No—no."

"But it is so preposterous when I come to think of it a second time."

"Is it?"

"It is, indeed. No, it won't do."

"Then, never mind. And yet, just for curiosity sake, suppose you tell us what the idea was that occurred to you."

"I don't mind telling you if you won't laugh at me, for I can't bear to be laughed at."

"Go on—go on; we won't laugh at you."

"Very well, then, the idea which just came all of a

sudden into my mind, was that we should attack Newgate as we should a castle, and fetch those we want out of it by main force."

"Ha! ha!"

"There you go. Now you said you wouldn't laugh at me."

"I know I did."

"And you do."

"But it's such a comical idea. The very notion, now, of we three storming Newgate. Ha! ha!"

"Stop a minute," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"What is it?"

"Well, as you know, there's many a true word spoken in jest."

"Oh! yes."

"Well, then, I don't see why a good plan of action should not be suggested in the same manner."

"What do you mean?"

"You shall hear."

"Surely you do not entertain old Matthew's idea of storming the citadel."

"I do, though."

"Ha! ha!"

"Never mind, Claude. Let those laugh who win."

"But, my dear fellow, the idea seems so excessively droll."

"Not so droll, perhaps, as you would first imagine."

"Explain yourself."

"Willingly, if you will allow me the opportunity."

"We shall only be too glad to do that."

"In the first place, then, just carry your thoughts back to what old Matthew expressed his conviction to be."

"What for the scheme to have any chance of success, must be a desperate one."

"Just so."

"Well, what then?"

"Isn't the scheme daring?"

"Certainly."

"Desperate?"

"Absurdly so."

"No—no; don't go so far as that. Just admit that it is desperate."

"What next?"

"I am surprised you do not catch at my idea."

"I do not."

"I will soon make matters clear to you."

"Pray do, for though I began in jest, I feel by this time fully in earnest."

"I intend you to be."

"We are, then."

"Matthew."

"Yes, Jack."

"In the first place, I address myself to you."

"Very well."

"After the trial of Adrian Winberry, and Dick Turpin was taken prisoner, what did you tell me the people in the court did?"

"Why, made a desperate scrimmage, and tried to rescue him with might and main."

"Precisely so. Now what does that argue?"

"Argue?"

"Yes. What conclusion could you come to from that circumstance?"

"Do you mean that the people in the court were friendly to Dick Turpin?"

"Certainly, that's just what I do mean. I think it's quite clear the people were disposed to stand Dick Turpin's friend, and liberate him if they could, or else they would not have tried to rescue him as they did."

"That is clear enough," said Claude Duval.

"Then put that and that together."

"No, I would rather you."

"I will, then. At first I was, like you, inclined to laugh at old Matthew's idea of storming Newgate, but then I thought that it might be done, and that the very daring of the enterprise would insure its success."

"Very likely; but I don't see how it is to be done."

"The thing seems to you to be an impossibility."

"It does."

"I'll make it plain. It's very certain we three can't do it unaided."

"Very true."

"Then we must get some one to aid us."

"But who? That's the difficulty."

"Not at all."

"Not at all?"

"No."

"How? Who could you find who would take part in such a serious affray?"

"The 'family'."

"The 'family'?"

"Yes."

"And I'll be sworn," said old Matthew, springing to his feet, with a joyful expression on his countenance, "and I'll be sworn that they will join you, every one."

"Perhaps they would," said Claude Duval.

"I am sure of it."

"I think they would," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Now, what do you think of that for a daring plan?"

"I don't think that one more daring could possibly be devised."

"Nor I."

"And yet have so many chances of success."

"We have not touched upon that part of the question yet."

"I have thought of it, however."

"Well?"

"You may depend, in the event of such an attack as I contemplate being made, those who are opposed to us will be completely paralyzed with astonishment, and we shall achieve our purpose before they recover from their surprise."

"What kind of an attack do you think of making?"

"We would enlist every member of the family in our cause, and I don't think myself there would be much trouble in doing that. We should have a very large force at our disposal, of which Claude and myself could take the command; and I am not afraid to say that we should storm Newgate even if it was twenty times stronger than it really is."

Old Matthew drew in his breath with an audible sound.

"It's an awful plot to talk over," he said.

"It is. But what will be the consequences? We shall break into the prison and liberate those we wish set free."

"Well," said Matthew, "I suppose it can't be helped; and as I said before, unless we adopt some desperate measure we can't succeed."

"That being the case, then, what more desperate means could you conceive than the one I have proposed?"

"None, certainly."

"Very well, then."

"It seems too dangerous."

"Pho—pho!"

"It does."

"But think how likely to succeed."

"Stay a moment, Jack."

"What is it?"

"I want you to tell us in few words what your plan is."

"To give an outline of it?"

"Just so."

"I will do that with very great pleasure. We must see all the 'family' somewhere. Go to one of the large kennels and propose what we want, namely, that they should place themselves under our leadership and storm Newgate—break into it, and set Dick Turpin and Tom King free. We could have horses ready and take advantage of the confusion to make our escape with all speed. Then we will all four once more cry 'Hurrah! for the Road!'"

"It will be worth something to be able to do that. I am sick of the life I have been lately leading."

"So am I."

"That reminds me that I have got an amendment of your plan to propose."

"Let us hear it, Claude."

"Suppose to-night we ask Matthew to get us a couple of first-class horses."

"Yes—yes."

"Provide us with arms."

"Yes."

"And then we would set out and spend the night in search of booty and adventures."

"Hurrah!" cried Sixteen-String Jack. "Capital. I second that motion at once."

"Come on, then. Now Matthew, let us have the horses."

But the landlord shook his head.

"You are not content," he said, "with what you have done already, but must incur fresh and unnecessary peril. Suppose you are captured to-night. How will your friends stand then?"

"You must not look at things from such a gloomy point of view, Matthew. We will, for our own sakes, take great care of ourselves."

"I suppose it is no good my advising you."

"Yes it is, Matthew. What do you think of our plan for enlisting all the 'family' in our service?"

"It is a good one."

"That's right. And you think we shall succeed?"

"You have a chance of success."

"Very well, then, Matthew, go and fetch the horses."

"No—no."

"Will you if I give you some good reasons for doing so?"

"I will try."

"In the first place, we ought not to go asking favours of the 'family' without money in our pockets."

"No."

"Then we have none. So you see we require a booty for that. Isn't that a good reason?"

"It is the risk I speak of."

"Then there you make a great mistake. I have shown you we are in want of booty, and the next thing will be to show you we are in want of an adventure. Now do you know how I shall do that?"

"No."

"Well, then, Claude and myself have been cooped up so long, and kept from any adventure on the highway, that our talents are quite rusting away. Our blood is getting chilled in our veins, and we want a good ride along the high-road to warm it. We shall then be in good condition for our work, so you see the reasons why we should make an excursion to-night are excellent."

"Well, well," said old Matthew, "I won't balk your fancy, for fear, after all, that something should go wrong in consequence, and then you would shift all the blame on to my shoulders."

"Just as you like, so long as you get us the horses."

"I will do so, but it will never do for you to mount here, everybody will be aware of it. You had better make your way out of the back door on foot, and as quietly as possible, and without attracting any more notice than you can help, direct your steps to the Oxford-road, where the horses shall be waiting for you."

CHAPTER CCCXXXII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT ON THE OXFORD-ROAD, AND MEET WITH A VERY REMARKABLE ADVENTURE.

THE two highwaymen were too well acquainted with the perils of their position not to see at once the wisdom of the little arrangement proposed by old Matthew, and they immediately acquiesced in it.

If there was anything that would warm the blood of our friends and steady their nerves, a gallop along the high-road and a spirit-stirring adventure, such as they had had in past times, would assuredly produce that effect.

In fact, the hide-and-seek sort of game which they had been playing so long did not suit them any better than the close confinement they had had ever since their arrival at the "White Horse."

Then they were rather poorly off for cash, and they knew some money would certainly be required in the carrying out of their designs.

For instance, when paying their visit to the "family," at the ken, one very requisite thing would be to treat those assembled all round with whatever they liked to cull for, and if a couple of hundred happened to be present that would cost something.

Then again, they could not tell what emergency might occur in which money might not be of the most essential service.

Under these circumstances, and influenced by these reflections, there certainly did seem every reason that they should set off on their little expedition.

Old Matthew, however, although he unwillingly gave his consent, took rather a different view of the affair than our two friends.

There was great danger attached to their excursion.

Mr. Wiggles, he felt sure, had by no means given up his search for them, although he had made no demonstration lately; but then he might perhaps be trying to lull them into a sense of false security.

That was the first danger, but by no means the last. A knight of the road was exposed to many perils.

They might have an end put to their career at any moment by a chance or well-directed shot, or by capture, or a thousand other accidents inseparable from their calling.

There was no reason why, if they had escaped so far, that they should escape to-night.

Then, if anything happened to them, how would Dick Turpin and Tom King fare in the Newgate cell?

This was the view which old Matthew took of the affair, but which was not participated by our two friends themselves.

Danger was a thing with which they were so familiar, that they had long ceased to look upon it with ordinary feelings.

They disregarded it completely.

Matthew requested them earnestly to take all possible care on this night at least, and painted the consequences which would occur if they should not return.

They readily promised.

Thus satisfied, the landlord set out to look after the horses.

Our friends, while he was gone, occupied themselves with making an examination of their different weapons, and placing them in such a condition that they would be available for instant service.

"Which road shall we take, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "We may as well make up our minds before we start."

"To be sure, Jack."

"Then, which do you say?"

"I hardly know. It seems ages to me since I cried 'Stand and deliver!' upon an English high-road!"

"And to me."

"Well, which way shall we take?"

"Suppose we say the Oxford-road?"

"Agreed. That will suit us as well as any."

"I have had many a good booty there."

"Oh, we will say the Oxford-road."

They had agreed upon this point when Matthew entered.

"I have sent off to a place for a couple of horses where I am sure of having good ones from, and I have told him to have them waiting in half-an-hour in front of the railings before Montague-house."

"That is in Bloomsbury Fields, is it not?"

"Yea."

"But you said the Oxford-road, Matthew?"

"I know I did, but this was a second thought."

"Oh?"

"You see, Montague-house is in a very retired spot—it is not so far from here to there as the Oxford-road."

"It will suit you for that, then, admirably."

"So it will."

The Montague-house referred to by our friends was a rather ancient edifice, which has, however, long since disappeared. Its site, however, is occupied by the British Museum, so it will be easy for our readers to understand its position.

Indeed, some will remember that the street on the east side of the British Museum, leading from Great Russell-street to Russel-square, is called Montague-street to this day.

This was the rendezvous which old Matthew had appointed.

No sooner had the half-hour expired, than the two highwaymen, who were in a state of perfect readiness, shook hands with old Matthew and departed.

Claude Duval had asked for a piece of rope, and had been accommodated with a coil of that material, which he wound round his waist.

He thought such a thing might come in useful. At any rate, if it was not wanted it would not much matter.

Thus equipped they started off.

They were allowed egress—not from the front door, but by the door in White Horse-yard.

Upon reaching this place, they looked up and down it as well as the darkness would allow them, but they saw nothing of their foes.

Encouraged by this, they, after a moment's deliberation, turned to the left, preferring to go in the direction of Drury-lane.

Upon emerging into this thoroughfare, the same searching glances were given, but neither Mr. Wiggles nor any of his men were in sight.

The night was early as yet.

The streets were tolerably thronged with people, though not so thickly as at the present day, for London a century and a quarter ago did not number so many inhabitants as it does now.

It would seem that, after all, Mr. Wiggles had given up the task of capturing the highwaymen.

Without any interruption whatever, Claude and Jack made their way along Drury-lane until they reached the top of it.

Then crossing the end of Holborn, they passed along a narrow street—now called Museum-street—which led them direct to their destination.

In the dim night-light Montague-house looked huge and sombre.

Advancing close up to the railings, the highwaymen stood with their backs to them, and waited for the appearance of the horses.

They had not long to wait.

Out of the gathering gloom they saw a man come mounted on a horse, and leading another by the bridle.

He was walking the animals slowly.

"There they are," said Claude, and, as he spoke, he hastened forward and addressed the man, who pulled up as soon as he saw them.

"Were you waiting for us?"

"Who are you? I am waiting for two gentlemen."

"And we are waiting for you."

"Give me some proof."

"We are friends of Matthew Gale's, the landlord of the 'White Horse' in Drury-lane."

"All right," said the man, slipping out of the saddle; "he ordered them."

Sixteen-String Jack gave the man a crown piece, and then followed Claude's example and mounted.

They seated themselves firmly in the saddle in a moment, and set off at a sharp trot.

The commencement of the Oxford-road was soon gained.

Claude and Jack, as soon as they were mounted, experienced that sense of exhilaration which no one can fail to feel when mounted on a good steed.

The motion, too, warmed them without fatiguing them.

"A gallop!" cried Jack, "a gallop! I feel once more as if I was a free man!"

He touched his steed lightly with his spurs as he spoke, and the gallant creature responded to it by bounding forward at a rapid speed.

Claude followed.

The Oxford-road was then quite free from houses, except a few which stood back surrounded by their own grounds, and they were very few about.

The road was almost deserted, so our friends had no obstacles to their progress.

On reaching Tyburn Gate our friends drew up, and Claude, thrusting his hand into his pocket, pulled out a handful of loose silver, which he gave to the tollman.

Having passed this obstruction, they proceeded at a more gentle pace.

They did not wish to exhaust their horses, but to reserve their powers until they had occasion to make use of them. It was a glorious night, and one which well suited their purpose.

There was no moon.

But the sky was thickly studded with brilliant stars which seemed to cast a faint twinkling radiance upon the earth.

With the exception of the slight illumination received from them, it was profoundly dark, yet not so dark as to prevent Claude and Jack from seeing the hedgerows and tall trees on either side of the road.

They were now fairly in the country, and quite away from all houses.

"This is glorious, Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack. "I feel myself again."

"We want something."

"What?"

"The presence of our two comrades."

"Dick and Tom."

"Yes, we do indeed."

"We shall have them, ere long."

"I trust so, and then we will see whether our old plan cannot be carried out. I mean the one which we devised immediately after Tom King's escape from Newgate."

"You mean forming ourselves into a band of four, with Dick Turpin to act as our captain."

"Just so."

"That would be glorious."

"Thus united, we will perform some deeds which shall by far transcend all that we have hitherto accomplished."

"We should be strong enough to overcome almost any force opposed to us, should we not?"

"Certainly."

"Do not let us speculate upon the future too much; you must recollect it looks very dark and uncertain."

"It does, indeed."

"Hark!"

"What!"

"Halt. I fancy I heard the sound of horses' hoofs."

Claude pulled up in a moment and so did Jack.

Then the two leant forward in their saddles, and listened intently for the repetition of the sound which the latter had heard.

It came quite plainly to their ears.

Undoubtedly it was the sound of horse's hoofs.

But unaccompanied by the rumbling of carriage wheels. The horse was coming at rather a slow walk.

"What are we to do, Claude?"

"Stop him."

"He is coming this way, I think."

"Oh, yes, he is coming to London. I wonder what makes him walk his horse so slowly as that?"

"I don't know."

"It seems strange."

"It does. The tread is quite measured and slow, as though the rider was in no sort of hurry."

"It is something unusual and strange, and that is quite sufficient reason for us to be cautious."

"It is."

"Let us draw aside as close under the shadow of the hedge as we can, and then, when the horseman passes us, which he is sure to do presently, we will have a look at him, and, if he seems of the right sort, it will be easy for us to overtake him."

"If he goes no faster than he does now."

The sounds came with greater and greater distinctness to the ears of our friends.

It was high time, they thought, that they took up their position, so they did so at once, and as noiselessly as possible.

Having done so, it would have required an eye of more than usual sharpness to have distinguished them from the hedge behind them. The only difference was the ground looked rather darker.

Our friends did not speak for fear the light breeze which was blowing should carry the sounds with it upon the still night air, and waft them into the ears of the approaching horseman.

They did not want him to have the least suspicion that they were on the road in ambush.

Should they attack him, their success would in a great measure depend upon taking him by sudden surprise.

With the same slow, steady motion the horseman came on.

There was something excessively odd about any one travelling the road at night at such a pace as that, and our friends could not make it out.

Anxiously they waited for a solution of the mystery.

To while away the time, each of the highwaymen drew a pistol from his belt, and, cocking it, held it in their right hands.

They were then armed and in readiness.

Five minutes elapsed.

Then, as Claude and Jack strained their vision down the road, a moving object came in sight.

They, assisted probably by their fancy, quickly made out its outlines to be a horse and rider.

Nearer and nearer he came, at the same slow walk.

He became more and more visible.

At length he came to within a few yards of our friends, who then saw that they were quite right.

It was a horse and rider.

The latter was clothed in garments of some dark colour, so dark, indeed, that his form was scarcely distinguishable.

On he came.

Suddenly, to the great surprise of our friends he pulled up in the middle of the road exactly opposite to them.

CHAPTER CCCXXXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL HITS UPON A VERY INGENUOUS EXPEDIENT FOR BRINGING THE OXFORD MAIL COACH TO A STANDSTILL.

THERE was something very strange and mysterious in all this, but the two highwaymen nevertheless felt that the mystery would be still further developed.

Straining their eyes until they positively ached again, they watched all the movements of the strange horseman.

They saw him look up the road, and to the right and to the left.

Then he assumed a listening attitude.

"I thought I heard horses' feet upon the road," he said; "but all is still now, so I suppose I was mistaken. And yet I could almost have sworn to it."

The horseman listened again, and somehow or other the idea came into the minds of Claude and Jack that the man on horseback was of the same trade as themselves, and that he was on the lookout for travellers.

Nevertheless, they did not move hand or foot, but continued to keep their eyes fixed upon him.

That they were perfectly invisible and indistinguishable from the hedge in the shadow of which they stood, they felt certain, for the horseman had several times looked in the direction of them, and never made the least movement or sound to show that he had seen them.

"I can't hear anything," said the horseman, aloud. "Curse it! what confoundedly dull work it is. Here have I been pacing up and down this road for more than an hour. I shall be glad when my time is up. However, I'll turn back, and try and meet my mate, and if we have a bit of chat together, that will pass away the time better. Come up, will you."

As the horseman addressed these last few words to his steed, he turned round, and walked slowly away in the direction he had just come.

It was not until the sounds of his horse's hoofs had entirely died away, that the highwaymen ventured to address each other, or even to move.

And then Claude Duval spoke.

"What do you make of that, Jack?"

"To tell the truth, I don't know what to make of it."

"Nor I, exactly."

"If he had spoken on purpose to mystify us as to who he was and what he wanted, he could not have done it better."

"It was a strange speech."

"Very."

"Did you hear what he said about riding down the road to meet his mate?"

"Yes."

"What did he mean?"

"I am no better able to judge than yourself."

"I don't like it at all, because I don't understand it; and anything I don't understand I don't like."

"Nor I."

"The best thing we can do, I fancy, is to walk forward very quietly, and, as soon as we come to a gap in the hedge, or a gate, or anything of that sort, we will make our way through it."

"And then follow this mysterious horseman, and try to overhear what he says to his mate."

"Just so."

"We shall then, no doubt, come to the root of the matter."

"So we shall."

"Forward, then. There is a dry ditch here. Walk along that, and then we are not so likely to be heard."

This good advice was followed.

About twenty yards further on along the road there was a gap in the hedge.

They resolved to avail themselves of it as a means of getting into the meadows.

Both dismounted, and getting through the gap first themselves, took hold of their horses by the bridles and drew them up after them.

They then mounted, and finding there was a quantity of short grass behind the hedge, they pushed on at a gentle trot.

The ground made the beat of the horses' hoofs quite inaudible.

At every few yards they would pull up and listen for the sound of the mysterious horseman.

At length they heard him.

He was going at the same slow, steady pace as before. Presently their practised ears could detect the sounds of another horse approaching them, also at a walking pace.

It may be that some suspicion of who the rider was crossed the minds of our friends, but, if so, they did not make any remark to each other concerning it.

Indeed, it would not be prudent for them to have done so.

Gently they kept on their way.

At length they heard a voice say:

"Is that you, Jenkins?"

"Yes, mate."

The trampling of horses' feet ceased, and the highwaymen came to a standstill.

"What awful dull work this is,"

"Awful."

"Have you heard anything?"

"No. Have you?"

"I fancied once I heard horses' feet coming from London, but I must have been mistaken, for I listened and could not hear them."

"Oh, you were mistaken, no doubt. I wonder when the relief will come?"

"Not for half-an-hour yet."

"How dreadful."

"It is. This patrolling the road is the dullest work I have ever had to do."

"I am sure it is that I have."

"I'd sooner be at Bow-street a good deal. When you are in London there is a chance of your getting shelter and some one to talk to."

"And something to drink."

"Yes, but here we are up and down this road without a house or a human being in sight."

"It's dreadful work."

"It is that. I had no idea what it was to patrol a road for two hours every night, but now I have found out to my cost."

"We have been on this job now for a matter of two months, and I am tired of it, I can tell you. We have never had an alarm of any sort all the while, have we?"

"Not once."

Sixteen-String Jack touched Claude on the arm.

"Come," he said, in the faintest possible whisper.

He pressed his heels against his horse's flanks as he spoke, and at a walk led the way across the meadow, going in a direction at right angles to the road.

Their progress was almost noiseless, and they got off without being heard by the men in the road.

The meadow was of considerable length, but our friends did not stop till they came to a hedge which barred their further progress. Then, feeling they were quite out of earshot, they spoke.

"What do you think of that, Claude?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

"Why, I think we have acquired a piece of very important and useful information."

"Very, indeed."

"I understand it all, now. The police authorities must have appointed a troop of mounted men to patrol the roads contiguous to the metropolis."

"That's it."

"And we have just seen two of them."

"Who don't seem very well pleased with their job."

"It must be awful dull work."

"Unquestionably."

"That accounts for his walking up and down the road in that mysterious manner. I couldn't make it out at first."

"Nor I."

"I am afraid this will interfere with us a great deal."

"It is sure to."

"I wonder old Matthew did not mention it."
 "You may depend he knows nothing at all about it."
 "Perhaps so."
 "We discovered it by an accident."
 "And a fortunate thing it was for us that we did."
 "Decidedly."
 "But I suppose you don't intend to let them baulk you of your intention."
 "Oh, dear no. It will surprise me if I go back to London empty handed."
 "And me."
 "Jack."
 "What, Claude?"
 "Do you recollect I asked for a piece of rope?"
 "Yes."
 "Do you know what I wanted it for?"
 "Not exactly."
 "Well, I may as well tell you. I have set myself a task."
 "What is it?"
 "You will join me, I know."
 "Let me hear what it is."
 "Well, then, I set out with the intention of stopping the Oxford Coach."

"The devil!"
 "It's a bold scheme, isn't it?"
 "It is, and more especially so now the roads are patrolled by mounted police."
 "That makes it awkward certainly, but I'll tell you how I shall do it."

"How?"
 "I shall pick a nice dark piece of road, with trees on each side, and I shall tie the rope right across."

"I understand."
 "That will throw the horses down in a moment."

"It's a good plan, Claude, and I don't see why it shouldn't answer. We should have to be quick."
 "Yes. But just think what a good booty we should have from all the passengers, without counting the mail-bags, which are sure to carry something worth having."

"That will set us up for a bit."
 "It will. Now, if you will take my advice, you won't stop any one else if you have ever so good a chance."

"Why not?"
 "Because it can't be done without raising an alarm."
 "I see."

"Which would be fatal to us. When we have stopped the coach we will make our way in as direct a line as possible to London, and not trouble after anything else."

"Agreed."
 "Come on, then. We will follow this hedge a little way, and then get into the high-road again."

"Perhaps, if we get further out into the country, we might miss the patrol."
 "Very likely."

Our friends again resumed their way, taking their way along the hedge which divided the meadow from the one next to it, and which ran parallel to the road.

It was a very fortunate thing for our friends that they discovered the existence of a mounted patrol on the road as they did.

If they had remained in ignorance of that fact, they might have been made acquainted with it at rather an awkward juncture, and in rather an awkward fashion.

Now, however, they were on the alert, and probably would not have much difficulty in avoiding the danger now that they were made acquainted with its presence.

The soft turf in the meadow was very grateful to the horses' hoofs, and they trotted along rapidly.

At length they came to another hedge, which put a stop to their progression in a straightforward direction.

They did not jump this as they might have done, but made their way towards the highway again.

As they had fully expected, they found a gate leading out into it.

It was fastened with a padlock, but Claude alighted from his horse, and soon got rid of that difficulty.

The gate swung open, and they all passed out into the road. They listened intently, but they were unable to hear anything of the patrol.

As quickly as possible, then, they made their way forward in such a direction that they must inevitably meet the Oxford Coach.

It was a daring feat for any two men to attempt under any circumstances, but especially so now the road was so well guarded as it appeared to be.

But our friends were bent upon the accomplishment of it, and the reader by this time must be aware that it was no trifle which prevented them from carrying out anything they had taken in hand.

We are rather inclined, however, to tremble for their safety.

Should they be either killed or captured, the aspect of affairs would be rather serious.

But, without the least dread whatever upon their minds, they trotted along the road as though nothing in the world was the matter.

At length, without meeting with any interruption, and without the occurrence of any incident, they arrived at a spot which Claude considered very well calculated to answer their purpose.

From some reason or other, the road was some few feet narrower than elsewhere.

It took rather a sharp curve, too, to the right. On both sides were some very tall trees, which grew to a great height, and, as a natural consequence, cast a deep shadow on the roadway.

That was increased by the tendency which the tops of the trees had to touch each other—indeed, in some places they were actually in contact.

So far all was favourable.

But there was something else which induced Claude to select that spot above all others.

The driver of the coach, would, of course, be aware of the sharp curve in the road, and, as a measure of safety and precaution, not only to himself, but to anything approaching, he would rein his horses in, and come round slowly.

This was just what was wanted. Sixteen-String Jack saw the advantage at once.

"This will be the place, I think," Claude said.

"Oh, yes; you could not possibly find a better."

"Then just hold my horse a moment, and I will alight and tie one end of the rope to a tree in readiness."

"Do so."
 Claude slipped off his horse, and, as he did so, he said:

"I will put my ear to the ground first, and listen if any one is coming."

"It will be prudent."

Claude laid himself down at full length in the roadway, and, placing his ear on the ground, listened very intently. No sound, however, came to his ears.

Satisfied of this, he slowly uncoiled the rope from round his waist, and then proceeded to tie one end of it very firmly to the trunk of one of the trees.

This done, he walked across the road, holding the rope loosely in his hands.

In another moment, however, their ears were assailed by the blast of a horn.

"The Oxford Coach," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Fasten the rope, Claude, we are just in time."

CHAPTER CCCXXXIV.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL PLUNDER THE OXFORD MAIL, AND BOTH HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE FROM DEATH.

ANOTHER blast of the horn followed Jack's words, which, though louder than the preceding one, was feeble—though, doubtless, had the coach been nearer than it was, it would have sounded a lusty note.

Claude Duval slipped the end of the rope round the tree on the other side of the road, and pulled it tight.

He held it in this position a moment or two, ready to let go in an instant should anything else want to pass before the stage-coach came up.

But there seemed to be no other vehicle upon the road. The rumbling of the wheels could now be heard with a distinctness which momentarily increased.

Claude now ventured to secure the rope.

Having done so, it formed a line right across the road, about two feet from the ground, and was a barrier of a very formidable character indeed.

It was tight and well secured. The rope was strong, and there were no fears of its breaking or the knots

giving way, at all events, until the service it was designed to perform was completed.

Claude put his hand upon it near the middle and tested its firmness, and feeling quite satisfied upon that point, he remounted his horse.

The coach was now very close at hand.

The rapid revolutions of the wheels upon the hard turnpike road made a continuous grating, showing the speed at which it was coming to be very great.

The horn was blown at frequent intervals.

In one of their calculations, however, our friends proved to be in error.

They had reckoned that, upon approaching the bend in the road close to which they had taken up their station, that the driver of the coach would slacken his speed, and come round carefully, for fear of a collision with any other vehicle which might be coming towards them.

But the driver did nothing of the sort.

He did not perceptibly check his horses, but the guard kept on blowing his horn almost unceasingly, the meaning of which was to let all people on the road know the stage-coach was coming, and to warn them to get out of the way.

From their advantageous position on horseback, our friends could see over the hedgerows, and after the lapse of a few moments they could see the reflection of the lamps on both sides of the vehicle, which shone with a strange effect upon the vegetation.

Little did the driver and guard and passengers think what sort of an adventure was awaiting them.

In fact, ever since the mounted patrol had been established, a feeling of great security had taken possession of the breasts of the public.

This owed its existence to the fact that, since the mounted police had patrolled the road, no robberies had been committed.

To stop a coach filled with people, many of whom were well armed, was at any time a daring undertaking for two men to resolve upon, but trebly so when the roads were watched by mounted police officers, whose particular duty it was to see that no such act was consummated.

But our friends had resolved upon it, and a few minutes now will serve to show what sort of success they met with.

The coach rolled on.

Claude and Jack backed their horses as close as they could to the bank on one side of the road, and then, with their pistols already in their grasp, they waited.

But at the same time they listened intently, so as to be aware if anything else besides the coach approached them. At length, with a sudden dash, the huge conveyance, with its four spirited horses, came round the corner of the road.

"Now, Claude," said Jack, "beready. Cry 'Stand.'"

"All right."

Sixteen-String Jack made this last request because Claude Duval had got a stronger and louder voice than he had himself.

The rope across the road must have been perfectly invisible to both the coachman and his horses.

Claude left his place of concealment.

He had two pistols in his hands.

One was loaded with ball.

The other with powder only.

This latter he discharged in the air, and immediately throwing it on the ground, passed the loaded one into his right, and, followed by Jack, reached the side of the stage-coach.

Our friends had found discharging a pistol loaded with powder only an excellent device.

They were able to load it heavily, and ram the charge down hard, so that, when the pistol was fired, not only would the report be tremendous and startling, but an intensely bright red flame would issue from the muzzle.

The sight and the sound of this had the effect of frightening people.

It made the high waymen seem as though they were in good earnest.

Scarcely had the report of this pistol ceased than Claude, in his most stentorian tones, cried:

"Stand and deliver! Halt! Pull up, coachman—pull up, I say, or I will send a bullet into your brains."

"Highwayman, *as he*," said the coachman, as he

made a vain effort to rein in his horses, who were startled by the report of the pistol and the sudden burst of flame proceeding from it.

But just at that moment the feet of the two leading horses got entangled in the rope which had been placed across the road for that purpose.

The others could not stop themselves, but fell down likewise, so the coach was brought somewhat suddenly to a standstill.

A succession of shrill shrieks now came from the interior of the coach.

By an arrangement to which they had mutually agreed, Sixteen-String Jack looked after the passengers on the roof of the coach and levied his contributions upon them, while Claude Duval performed the same interesting operation upon those who occupied the interior.

Now the guard of a stage-coach, who always sits at the back in a seat provided for his special accommodation, was provided with two instruments which he was to make proper use of as occasion required.

One was a long tin horn.

The other was a blunderbuss.

The first was to herald the approach of the coach.

The other was to defend the passengers from any attack which might be made upon it.

Both hung in wicker baskets provided for their reception, in very loving contingency with each other.

The guard, then, as soon as he saw Sixteen-String Jack, who had ridden close up to the coach and demanded the purses of the outside passengers, the guard, we say, with many wise shakes of the head and hushes, proceeded to draw the blunderbuss from its receptacle.

Then, when he had it out, he cocked it, and placing the butt against his shoulder, took careful aim at the highwayman.

The huge, bell-shaped mouth of the instrument looked terrifying to a degree. With a triumphant and exultant feeling about his heart, the guard pulled the trigger.

The result was rather startling to the guard, and decidedly not pleasant.

It was many a day since the clumsy firearm had been discharged.

Now it was overloaded.

There was a flash of white smoke.

Then a roaring report like the discharge of a small cannon.

Mingled with the sound was an awful cry.

It came from the lips of the guard.

It was echoed by many of the passengers on the roof.

The barrel of the blunderbuss had burst, and the guard, with the hideous yell we have mentioned, fell bleeding and wounded, from his seat at the back of the coach into the roadway.

It was the recoil of the weapon which did it.

Several of the outside passengers were injured, but not seriously.

But how did Sixteen-String Jack fare?

He escaped unhurt.

But how?

His attention had been attracted towards the back of the coach.

He saw something was going on.

The next moment he caught sight of the bell-mouthed barrel of the blunderbuss pointed straight at him. He knew how little dependence could, in a general way, be placed upon those weapons.

Still he did not like to run the risk of this one being powerless to harm him.

Directly he saw it he slipped off his horse on to the ground.

Nor was he a moment too soon.

The discharge followed instantly, and a perfect storm of missiles flew over his horse, and which must have riddled him through and through had he remained.

No sooner was the danger over than he recovered himself, and, springing into the saddle, called out so that his comrade should know he was unhurt.

He spoke in somewhat sterner tones than before.

"Quick—quick. Give me your purses every one of you. Throw them into my hat. If any one hesitates, that moment will be his last."

This threat had the desired effect, and purses of various kinds were thrown into the hat.

Jack rapidly transferred them to the capacious pockets of his coat, and then cried:

"Now, gentlemen, your watches."

There was a little demur to this, but the sight of Jack's pistol silenced all scruples, and the watches were handed to him.

Jack now turned his attention to the driver, from whom he expected to get by far the most valuable portion of booty.

"Coachy," he cried, "do you want to see the sun rise to-morrow?"

The driver glared at him, but made no reply.

"Because, if you do," continued Jack, "the only way by which you can do so will be by immediately hauding me the mail bags which you know are in the box under your seat."

"The mail bags," gasped the coachman. "I am a ruined man. Oh, good gentlemen, protect me."

But the passengers were deaf to his appeal.

If they did not feel inclined to imperil their lives for the salvation of their own valuables, they were scarcely likely to do so for those belonging to other people.

"Coachman," said Jack, "hand me those bags. If you refuse or hesitate a moment longer, so sure as you now breathe, you are a dead man."

"Murder."

"You may call it murder if you like, but I should call it suicide."

"Suicide?"

"Yes, for you will be throwing your life away when there is no occasion for you to do so. Come—come, I cannot linger longer. The mail bags, I say, without you want me to shoot you first and take them afterwards, for to have them I am determined."

With a dismal groan, as he reflected upon what would be the consequences of this night's work, the coachman got up off his seat and opened the box to which Sixteen-String Jack had alluded, and which was provided for the reception of the mail bags.

The coachman was very reluctant to give them up, because he was responsible for their safe keeping.

But then, he thought, as the highwayman was determined to have them, that he had better give them up than be shot, and have them taken afterwards just the same.

With a heavy heart, then, he handed them to Jack, who threw them before him on the saddle.

Having related so far what befel Jack in his attempt upon the outside, we will proceed to turn our attention to the success Claude had with the inside passengers.

Riding straight up to the door of the coach, he caught hold of the window with his left hand, and let it down with a crash.

Scarcely had it finished clattering down in its frame than there was a sudden report.

Claude felt his hat fly off his head, and a tingling sensation all along his scalp.

This, of course, startled him for the moment, but Claude had been fired at more than once in his life, and he knew from experience that if you hear the report of a firearm you are alive.

So on this occasion he was certain that, beyond a slight wound, there was nothing the matter.

Without, then, a perceptible pause, he put his head in at the carriage window, and projected the barrel of a pistol into the vehicle.

An oil-lamp cast a tolerable radiance around, and by the aid of this Claude was able to see the different passengers.

The inside of the coach was quite full.

"That's a rough welcome," said Claude, in off-handed tones, as though it was the simplest matter in the world. "But never mind, I must have my shot back, or else it would not be fair."

Claude used his eyes well while he made this speech, for the double purpose of seeing when anyone made an attempt upon his life, and who it was who had fired the shot which was so near being a fatal one.

When he spoke about returning it, he saw one gentleman shrink back.

That was enough.

Claude knew him.

"Come, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "You don't seem very well pleased. However, we must have busi-

ness first and pleasure afterwards. I will attend to you, sir, in a few moments."

These words were addressed to the man who had shrunk back, and who Claude suspected of having fired the shot.

He was still further confirmed in this suspicion by seeing him change colour visibly.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "time presses. Be good enough, therefore, to be as quick as possible. Your money, watches, rings, and other valuables. Hand them to me quietly, and you will receive no personal violence whatever. But you must be quick, and give them up without resistance. Now."

Still the passengers hesitated.

"Come now," said Claude, "this is really too bad. You cannot escape, and it will be much better for you to give the things up with a good grace than compel me to use force, which I shall be compelled to do. Now, then, I will begin with you, sir."

Claude addressed an elderly gentleman who sat next the door with his back to the horses, and whose face was a picture of ludicrous fright.

In a helpless, confused sort of way, he put his hand into his breast and pulled out a pocket-book, which, in less than a minute afterwards, was safe in Claude's pocket.

CHAPTER CCCXXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE ATTACKED BY THE PATROL.

"That's a beginning," he said. "Come, follow this gentleman's example. Really, it's too bad of you. You don't deserve to have any forbearance shown you—you don't, indeed. Come, I shall proceed to harsh measures."

The passengers looked at Claude and saw the determined expression on his countenance, though he spoke so good-temperedly.

They also looked at the long, bright barrel of the pistol, which was resting in a negligent sort of way upon the side of the coach window.

They thought it best policy to submit.

Purses, watches, rings, brooches, ear-rings, and all the valuable articles worn by people tolerably well off, were one after the other handed to him.

The booty was considerable, and must have represented a very large amount.

Claude was highly pleased with the success he had met with, and felt inclined to pardon the man who had fired at him, and who after all had only done his duty, and acted just as he would have done himself had their positions been reversed.

But something else occurred which produced a complete revulsion of feeling.

While Claude's attention had been wholly occupied in receiving the various valuables as they were handed out to him, this man, with the utmost secrecy and caution, managed to draw another pistol.

He was not perceived by anyone.

Then, when Claude was off his guard, and in the act of making the reflection we have recorded, he hastily put the weapon on full cock, raised it to a level, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

The first intimation that Claude had as to what had taken place was the click of a piece of steel.

But the pistol missed fire.

The powder merely flashed in the pan.

With a terrible oath, this man flung the useless pistol full in the face of the highwayman, in the hope that he might thereby do him a serious injury.

But Claude drew aside just in time to avoid the well-aimed and dangerous missile, which fell harmlessly enough into the roadway.

There was now an end to all Claude's pacific intentions. His life had been a second time deliberately and treacherously aimed at.

Nothing but the chance circumstance of the pistol missing fire saved his life.

Had it not done so, he must have inevitably perished, for his body quite blocked up the coach window, so as to make it an impossibility to avoid hitting him somewhere. But providentially he escaped.

There was, however, a flushed and angry look upon the



[THE THIEVES' KEN IN WHITEPRIARS.]

face of Claude Duval, as turning the handle of the coach door, he flung it open.

"Come, sir," he said, addressing the man who had fired, "I must trouble you to alight. You have had what you would call two fair shots at me, and I must have what I call two fair shots at you."

"No—no."

"No, say you? But I must. I presume you are a gentleman."

"Precisely so; and it is for that reason I cannot exchange shots with a highwayman."

"Such a pretext as that will avail you little. I have no such scruples, and I tell you, once for all, if you do not alight, I will fire at you where you are. There will be the risk of hitting some of the other passengers, but that will be entirely your fault."

"No—no, good Mr. Highwayman," cried the other passengers. "Make him alight. Don't fire in here—pray don't. Why, all the way along that gentleman has been swaggering and boasting, and saying how he should

like the coach to be attacked by highwaymen, just to show us what he should do."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Claude Duval, "I should be very unwilling to injure any of you in the slightest degree, or even to run the most distant risk of doing so, but really you must, in self-defence, compel the gentleman to alight."

"We'll soon do that, sir, if you will wait a moment," cried the passengers, and, as they spoke, they set about forcing the gentleman to alight.

To facilitate them in what they were about, Claude opened the coach door.

The whole of the passengers made common cause against the boasting traveller.

They pushed him with all their might, and, as their united strength by far exceeded his, they succeeded in getting him close to the coach door.

Then Claude, leaning forward on his saddle, stretched out his hand, and, seizing him by the collar of his coat with a firm grasp, drew him out into the roadway.

The old gentleman who sat next to the door slammed it shut in a moment, leaving him to his fate.

The boasting gentleman fell rather heavily into the roadway when Claude released his hold.

But he quickly scrambled to his feet.

"Now," said Claude, "I give you a chance for your life. I will count three, and, if by the time I pronounce the third word you are not out of the range of this pistol, you will have no one to blame but yourself. Now! One!"

"No, my fine fellow," said the traveller, plucking up a courage that had a great deal of desperation in it.

"No, I will try what I can do for you."

He fumbled in his pockets while speaking.

Claude took no notice, but quietly said:

"Two."

The traveller turned round, and prepared to fly.

"Three," said Claude.

But his adversary had taken one bound, and then gone through the hedge.

However, Duval fired his pistol after him, though whether it took any effect he did not stop to inquire, for he heard the sudden trampling of horses' hoofs, which showed that some one was approaching at a very rapid rate, indeed.

At the same moment, Sixteen-String Jack, who had quite finished with the outsiders, cried—

"Off and away, Claude! Off and away! The grabs are after us! Off and away!"

At the same moment, Sixteen-String Jack struck his spurs into his horse's flanks, and galloped in the direction of the country.

Claude lost no time in following his example, for the sound of horsemen, coming from the direction of London, reached his ears with a great deal too much plainness to be pleasant.

The hearts of the highwaymen were elated with the success they had met with in their perilous adventure, and they looked upon this prospect of a gallop into the country with feelings of pleasure rather than otherwise.

A few words passed between them as to what kind of booty they had been able to obtain, and the question was asked as to what kind of hurts they had received, which were really too insignificant to be mentioned.

"We have done a daring thing, and got off well in every respect," said Claude Duval. "To-morrow all London will ring with this."

"It will, indeed."

"Hark, what is that?"

With a sudden rush two horsemen darted forward and planted themselves exactly in the path of our friend, who were consequently compelled to pull up or be thrown down. Of course they chose the former alternative.

"Surrender!" cried the two horsemen, by whom they were confronted. "Surrender!"

"For what?"

"You know for what. We are perfectly well aware of who you are. You are highwaymen, and our prisoners."

"We may be the one but we are certainly not the other," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us pass."

"Not so fast, my fine fellows; we have got you, and we mean to keep you."

"As for having us, I think we could show you a clean pair of heels if we wished it."

"And meet the next patrol along the road."

"Is that it? Then we will try, if you like, whether we are your prisoners or you ours?"

Our friends noticed that the two mounted police-officers held drawn swords in their hands, and as they (Claude and Jack) carried such weapons by their sides, they drew them from their sheaths.

The next moment the four bright blades were crossed. The steel clashed together with a ringing sound.

The two police officers, who were well skilled in the sword exercise, did little more than defend themselves from their antagonists.

They were prolonging the conflict as much as they could, so that the sounds of the affray should reach the ears of the other men patrolling the road, and so that they should surround them, thus making them an easy prey.

From the way in which they dallied, this suspicion soon entered the minds of the highwaymen, and shouting out their convictions to each other, at the same

moment precipitated themselves with the utmost vigour upon their foes.

The fight now commenced in real earnest.

The weapons rang together.

The bright blades flashed in the murky light.

The horses reared and plunged.

The officers had much ado to defend themselves from the furious onslaught thus made upon them, and they were effectually prevented from taking any undue advantage by firing a pistol or otherwise, because the left hand was continually employed in holding the reins and manœuvring the horse, while with their right they had to ward off as best they could the furious attack which the highwaymen commenced.

It was no longer child's play.

It was not long before the two police-officers became aware that, skilful as they were in the use of the sword, their opponents were far superior to them.

Anxiously, then, they strained their sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to catch some sound which would indicate the coming of assistance.

Whenever they could, too, they cast uneasy glances up the road, but they could see nothing.

Suddenly, however, there came upon the ears of all four of the combatants the trampling of horses' hoofs upon the road.

The sound was faint.

But distinct.

Our friends had everything to dread from that sound. Their foes everything to hope.

The consequence was that both redoubled their endeavours.

The highwaymen were quite certain that unless they disposed of their adversaries, and that at once, they should be surrounded and opposed by such a force as would make resistance futile.

Still, let it be said, that they did not take or attempt to take any unfair advantage of their foes.

They merely fought with greater desperation.

And now Claude, by putting into execution a skilful feint, threw his enemy off his guard.

It was only for a moment.

But that moment was enough.

Changing the position of his sword with the rapidity of lightning, he made a thrust at the officer's breast, and before he could recover his guard, the sharp steel entered his breast with so much violence, that the point protruded from his back.

Claude withdrew his sword instantly, and held it in an attitude of defence, for he did not know how much his foe might have been injured from this thrust.

And well for him was it that he did so.

The officer, who seemed maddened with rage and pain, attacked Claude in such a frantic manner that he had the greatest difficulty in defending himself.

Soon, however, the vigour with which the wounded officer dealt his blows, abated, and one more slashing out in the shoulder from Claude's sword sent him headlong to the ground.

Sixteen-String Jack had found himself opposed to a man much his superior in those physical qualities necessary to a swordsman.

He was a taller and a stronger man than Jack, and had besides a very great advantage which a long arm bestows.

Notwithstanding these disadvantages, however, Sixteen-String Jack did not shrink from the encounter, but put forth all the cunning tricks in fencing of which he was the master.

It was only by this that a balance of any kind was preserved between them.

Jack, however, had been wounded twice, and rather severely too, but still he did not show the slightest symptoms of giving way.

He was still engaged with his foe when Claude freed himself from his antagonist.

Of course the first thing to which Claude Duval directed his attention was the condition of his friend.

He saw him much the worst off in the affray, and he hurried to his assistance, for the trampling of the horses' hoofs sounded with a distinctness that was really alarming.

It was evident that in less than another minute they would reach the spot upon which he now stood.

The police-officer who had so nearly obtained a victory

over Sixteen-String Jack, finding that his comrade had fallen and that he was opposed to both, flung down his weapon and sued for quarter—although assistance was to all appearance so close at hand.

Quarter was granted to him on condition that he dismounted, which he immediately did.

Claude then caught hold of his steed by the bridle, and compelled him to gallop along by the side of his own, into whose flanks he struck the spurs rather deeply.

Sixteen-String Jack did the same.

With a rush, then, the defeated police-officer was left in the roadway, for the horses had all grown excited while the battle was in progress, and, consequently, feeling the spur, they darted off at a very rapid rate indeed.

But though our friends had come off victorious in this encounter, yet they were far from being secure.

On the contrary, they were placed in a position of the greatest danger.

Sixteen-String Jack had received two severe wounds from the sword of his opponent, from both of which the blood flowed in great quantities.

Then the horsemen they had heard approaching from the direction of London were, by the time they started, fully in sight.

A cry which they uttered had the effect of making the highwaymen aware they were seen, and they turned round quickly to see who their pursuers were.

One glance was sufficient.

Coming along at a tremendous gallop was a large body of police-officers.

They saw the highwaymen turn round, for they set up a shout the moment they did so, which sounded in their ears like a demand to surrender.

This our friends were not likely to pay any attention to, without their position was very much worse than it was.

All they did was to strike their spurs once more into their horses' sides, which caused them to tear along the road at full speed.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SEEK SHELTER IN AN INN, AND HAVE A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE.

CLAUDE DUVAL quickly found the horse he held by the bridle was a very great incumbrance.

He would not have burdened himself with it at all if he had not thought by so doing he should be depriving the defeated officer of the means of following them.

And this he quite succeeded in doing, for the other horse, when his rider fell headlong to the ground, was naturally much terrified, and he galloped off over the fields at a great rate, and was out of sight almost immediately.

Having effected his object, Claude thought he could not do better than release his hold upon the bridle, which he accordingly did.

The horse, however, seemed by no means disposed to part company, but galloped by the side of them just as before.

There was no objection to his doing this. On the contrary, it might, for all they knew, turn out to be a great advantage to have a spare horse in case either of their own should fail.

The officers in pursuit, who had reached the stage-coach soon after the highwaymen had stopped and plundered it in the manner we have related, there learned all the particulars of the outrage.

A description of the two highwaymen was furnished them, and they were also told in which direction they had gone.

They set off in pursuit at once, leaving the coachman and passengers to do the best they could.

The horses, who had grown very restive after the rope threw them down, had broken the harness and done other mischief, so, in all probability, some little time would elapse before they would be able to resume their journey.

The police-officers, however, cared nothing at all about the passengers, nor about the inconvenience they suffered.

They were intent upon capturing the highwaymen.

After a short gallop they were so fortunate as to get in sight of them, and this acted as a considerable stimulus to their exertions.

Going at such a rapid rate as they were—and their horses' hoofs making such a din upon the ground as

they did—the two highwaymen found conversation a very difficult thing indeed.

But it was necessary they should speak to each other, so, raising his voice to its utmost pitch, Claude asked—
"Are you hurt much, Jack?"

"Yes," replied his companion, but although he strove his utmost, his voice was so faint that Claude could scarcely tell what he said.

"You alarm me, Jack."

"No—no."

"You do."

"The wounds are merely flesh wounds."

"Oh!"

"But they bleed profusely, and it is from loss of blood I am suffering as much as possible."

"Cannot you do anything to staunch it?"

"Not while we are going at this rate; and to stop would be madness. No, no, my friend; we must push forward at our utmost speed, and distance our pursuers."

"I think we are doing that now. At any rate, I am sure they are not gaining upon us."

Sixteen-String Jack listened as well as he could to the sounds which came from his pursuers in the rear, and he was certain they were much fainter than they had been.

But this, so far from making them feel satisfied with the exertion and the progress they had already made, induced them to urge their horses to still greater efforts.

The gallant creatures obeyed them well.

Doubtless old Matthew had chosen the horses himself, and was aware of the excellence of their quality—a thing so necessary to our friends.

Away they went, then, at a tearing gallop.

Sixteen-String Jack felt very faint and giddy.

With difficulty he retained his seat in the saddle.

Every now and then he would sway from side to side, and be in imminent danger of falling off.

But each time he recovered himself. A thing more attributable to his skill in horsemanship than anything else.

He had received two wounds, and both almost in the same place—that is to say, in the fleshy part of his right shoulder.

They were deep, and the blood flowed from them in surprising quantities.

The rapid action, too, increased the hemorrhage.

Presently, upon Claude calling out for him to do so, he pulled up.

Both listened.

It was only in a very faint manner that the hoof-beats of their pursuers came to their ears, but the ever-increasing loudness of it told them they were pushing forward with all possible speed.

"Now, Jack," said Claude, "let me bind up your wound."

"No—no. Never mind. Push on a little further, until we are quite out of the hearing of our foes, and then we will take to the fields."

"If you can wait, Jack, until then, it would be much better for us, as some time must be lost in the operation, and we might have a great deal of difficulty in regaining the advantage we now have."

"To be sure we shall. Forward—forward!"

Sixteen-String Jack struck his spurs into his horse's sides as he spoke, and set the example of galloping forward.

Claude Duval could not help admiring the pluck which he displayed.

It was some time before they came to a halt again, and when they did a large piece of ground had been passed over.

The most attentive listening could not, on this occasion, bring to their ears the least sound of the officers in pursuit.

"Now, Jack," cried Claude, "all is well. We have distanced them at last. A few minutes more and we shall quite elude them."

"Thank heaven for that," said Sixteen-String Jack, faintly.

"Cheer up, my friend. Your voice is low."

"I have lost much blood."

"I am afraid so. But, look! here is a white gate which leads apparently into some meadows. I will dismount and open it. When we have passed through I will close it again, so as to cause no suspicion."

As he spoke, Claude slipped off his horse and opened the gate, which was merely fastened with a piece of chain, but in such a manner that any one not let into the secret of it would not undo it without a great deal of trouble.

But it was the business of the highwaymen to make themselves acquainted with fastenings of every description, so the probability is, that Claude opened the gate with as much ease and quickness as the farmer himself could have done to whom the field belonged.

He fastened it again, and then remounted. "This is a ploughed field," he said. "We shall have to cross it slowly or we shall knock our horses up completely. Still as I cannot hear anything of our foes, it will not matter, and you will besides have an opportunity of putting a rude bandage of some kind round your shoulder. Here, you had better take my neckcloth; you will find that answer the purpose admirably."

Claude Duval pulled off his neck the obsolete piece of attire he had mentioned, and handed it to Jack.

It was already in the form of a bandage, and he slipped it over his shoulder without much difficulty.

They went at a walking pace across the ploughed field, so that he was enabled to drop his reins upon his horse's neck, and proceed in perfect safety.

By this means he had both his hands at liberty.

The flow of blood was checked in a very great degree, but the wound was not properly bound up.

By the time he had done this the opposite side of the field was reached.

There was a gap in the hedge through which they led their horses.

They then found themselves in a spacious meadow.

They crossed, and proceeded in a straight line for a considerable distance across the country.

They had now every reason to believe that they had completely baffled their pursuers and thrown them off the scent.

Believing this, they came to a halt; and then the first thing Claude did was to bind up his companion's wound afresh, and in as skilful a manner as he was able.

The bandage was already saturated with blood.

Jack was very faint and sick.

The quantity of blood he had lost was incredible, and the wonder is that he could have borne up against its loss with so much impunity as he did.

He was, however, in reality in a fearful state of weakness and the feeling increased in intensity every moment.

Jack did not complain, but Claude could tell his condition, and the necessity for his seeking shelter and rest somewhere was imperative.

But they seemed to be in one of those sparsely populated agricultural districts, at that time by far more common than they are now.

Nowhere could the least signs of a habitation of any kind be seen.

But they determined to push on in the hope of meeting with one ere long.

After the elapsion of about half-an-hour, they came to what they had all along expected to find by proceeding in one direction, and that was a lane.

It was a broad one, and extended right and left as far as they could see.

But to what place it led they had no idea.

They could see the lane through the interstices of the hedge, but none of these were large enough to admit of a passage.

But our friends felt convinced that they had only to go a certain distance to find a gate through which they could pass without any trouble.

Indeed, there was one in sight just at their left hand.

Upon reaching it they found it was secured by a padlock, but a large stone happening to be close by, Claude picked it up, and dashed it with full force upon it, smashing the whole affair at once.

This done he pulled the gate open upon its hinges, and his friend passed through.

Claude Duval had not grown so far confused in his geography as not to know in which direction to go along this lane in order to get nearer London.

He had to turn to the left.

This was the way, then, he went at an easy pace for the comfort and convenience of his wounded companion, all the time keeping a sharp look-out for a dwelling of some kind.

But they went three miles at least, without meeting with a shed even.

Suddenly, however, Claude's quick eye detected a bundle of straw hanging by a rope to a post.

In the olden time the proximity of an inn was often denoted by this means.

Riding up to this post, Claude saw a board projecting from it, upon which in the faint night light he could see some letters were painted, but he could not make them out.

But when he lighted a small lantern which he carried in his pocket, he was easily able to do so.

The words were these—

"The 'Spotted Dog.' First turning on the right. Good accommodation for man and beast."

Claude read these words aloud to Jack, who said—

"Do you know this inn, Claude?"

"No."

"Will it be safe to stop there, think you?"

"We will risk it, my friend. In the state you are in a little rest and proper attention to your wounds are imperative, or you will eventually suffer severely."

"I do want rest, Claude."

"I know you do."

"Shall we be safe?"

"We will run the risk. If danger comes we must be prepared to resist it, and defend ourselves."

At this moment a narrow turning was reached, and Claude added—

"Here we are."

"It looks a dismal-looking entrance."

"It does. If I had been travelling along this road, I should never have thought of turning up there to find an inn, if the inscription on the board had not warned me to do so."

"Not I."

A shudder crept over Jack's frame as they turned down this narrow lane.

Why he could scarcely say.

He attributed it to the blood he had lost.

But certainly the aspect of the place was rather forbidding.

The lane which apparently led to the "Spotted Dog" was a very narrow one, being barely wide enough to allow the passage of one vehicle.

On one side of this lane was an unusually high hedge-row, with tall trees at frequent intervals.

The other side appeared to be bordered by a plantation of considerable extent.

Being so narrow, these trees cast a very deep and black shadow over the lane, so that it was more like entering a cavern or a tunnel than aught else, except that the blue sky and stars could be discerned overhead.

It was certainly a very extraordinary locality to choose for an inn, and with so forbidding an entrance, Claude thought that it must have been seldom they had any customers.

After proceeding some twenty yards, however, the lane widened somewhat, and then on the left-hand side of the lane Claude saw a faint light.

It looked as though it came from a candle placed close to a window-pane, and this was really the case.

The sound of their horse's hoofs must have been heard, for a man emerged from the inn, carrying a stable-lantern in his hand.

The inn was built upon that side of the lane which was bordered by the plantation already spoken of.

The trees which grew in it consisted chiefly of dark firs and horse-chestnuts, which gave it a gloomy and sombre appearance.

Our friends could not see what kind of a man it was who approached, for he held the lantern before him in such a manner that none of the beams fell upon his own person.

"Hullo!" he said, in a gruff voice, "Hullo! there. Who are you?"

"Travellers. We saw your board up, and the truss of straw a little way down the road, and we want to rest ourselves and our horses for a little while."

"All right, gentlemen," said the man with the lantern. "You will find the best of accommodation at the 'Spotted Dog.'"

CHAPTER CCCXXXVII.

JOSEPH "VERY STRANGE ADVENTURES BEFALL CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DURING THEIR STAY AT THE "SPOTTED DOG" INN.

"LEAD the way, then," cried Claude Duval, "and we will follow you."

"All right, gentlemen. This way, if you please. This way. John—John!"

"Yes," said a sleepy, surly voice, and then Claude and Jack heard a heavy footstep.

The next moment he came within the light of the lantern, and it could be perceived that he was attired like an ostler.

But the expression of his countenance was forbidding in the extreme.

He came towards the horses, and held the stirrups for our friends to dismount.

As soon as his feet reached the ground, such an accession of weakness came over Sixteen-String Jack that he almost fell to the ground.

Claude ran to his assistance, and was just in time to save him.

"My friend has been wounded," he said, addressing the ostler and the man who held the light. "I am afraid he is in a state of extreme weakness, but I don't think he is seriously injured."

"I will help you to take him indoors," said the man, putting down his lantern. "We have only a step or two to go."

Of course Claude Duval did not reject the aid thus proffered, and between them Sixteen-String Jack was led to the door of the inn.

This was closed, but it opened to a touch.

They entered a room on the ground floor, where there was a light and a fire burning in the grate.

As soon as he was placed upon a seat, Jack fainted. Claude called for water and a sponge.

They were quickly brought, and with the aid of these the coagulated blood was washed away, and then two very ugly-looking, gaping wounds were disclosed.

But Claude Duval's surgical knowledge assured him that those wounds looked to be by far more dangerous than they actually were.

He applied cold water plentifully, and then skilfully bandaged his shoulder.

Still Sixteen-String Jack continued insensible, and in this condition he was, by his comrade's directions, carried upstairs and placed upon the outside of a bed.

Left to himself, Claude proceeded to recover him from his swoon, and after some time succeeded.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, Jack fell off into a deep sleep, which Claude did not attempt to interrupt, for he knew that would more than anything tend to recuperate his strength.

He sat beside him and watched.

From his pocket he produced one of the numerous watches he carried about him, and looked at the time. It was half-past eleven.

"The night is young yet," he muttered. "We can stop here some hours, and then manage to return to London before daybreak, which will suit very well."

Having come to this conclusion, Claude, who felt not in the least sleepy or fatigued, proceeded to count up the booty they had taken from the passengers in the Oxford mail.

He found it represented a very large sum, being, in fact, about three times as much as he required for his immediate purpose.

Having done this, Claude looked round him at the nature of the place he was in.

It was an ordinary looking apartment, with one plain bed, without hangings, in one corner of the room. The floor was uncarpeted.

Claude could not but think the behaviour of the inmates of the inn rather extraordinary.

He had seen no one but the two rough-looking men we have described, and these had willingly enough left him and his wounded companion to shift for themselves.

No questions had been asked about him or the condition in which he was.

All that they seemed to care about was to get them into the inn.

Not the least sound from below reached his ears. He might as well have been in an uninhabited house.

After listening for a moment, he went to the window. It was one which opened like a door, and, undoing the catch, he pushed it back upon its hinges.

Then looked out.

He found the view exceedingly circumscribed.

He could see nothing but the black-looking trees in the plantation, the branches of some of which were almost long enough to touch the window-panes.

There was nothing to be seen there, so he closed the window again.

The intense stillness of the place made Claude feel uneasy, and a thousand vague apprehensions entered his mind.

The strange position of the inn—so retired—so out of the way as it was—struck him as being very strange and unusual.

Then there was the forbidding countenances of the two men.

The more he thought, the more did gloomy feelings creep over his mind, so at last he was fain to rise to his feet and endeavour to chase them away by walking up and down the room.

But in this he failed entirely.

They increased.

The chamber was but dimly lighted by a solitary candle which he had placed upon the mantel-piece, because he thought there its light would be most diffused. Sixteen-String Jack was breathing laboriously.

Claude was anxious about the condition of his comrade, because he knew so much was dependent upon his exertions on the morrow.

He took the candle in his hand and walked towards the bed, in order to judge, if possible, by his looks what kind of condition he was in.

The heavy slumber entirely produced by the exhaustion of his system, still continued, and there was upon the face of the sleeper an expression of great agony.

Doubtless the pain of the wound was great, though Jack was unconscious of it.

The bleeding had, however, entirely ceased, or at any rate, it had not penetrated through the wet bandages which Claude had tied over it.

We have said that he had caused Jack to be laid on the outside of the bed.

But now, perceiving that he shivered at short intervals, he considered it must proceed from the cold, and that it would be best to cover him over in some way and keep him warm.

He would feel the cold, he thought, in consequence of the blood which had been drained out of his body.

It was easy to cover him, Claude thought, without disturbing his position in the least, by simply going to one side of the bed, and turning the clothes over him.

This he resolved to do, so he deposited the candle on a chair by the bedside, and, taking hold of the clothes, he folded them half over, by this means of course, covering his companion completely, for the bed was wide and of an old-fashioned make.

In turning the clothes over, although he was not aware of it at the time, Claude had taken hold of them all, the bottom sheet included, so that when they were in the position we have indicated, the bed was exposed to view.

Claude did not notice this until he took the candle up in his hands again, and held it down to look at his friend once more.

The light of the candle then fell with full force upon the striped fabric which contained the bed.

Mechanically Claude's eyes rested upon it, but his attention was attracted by a large dark stain, only one half of which apparently was disclosed to view, the other half being under the folded clothes.

There was something peculiar about this stain, and Claude held the candle so as to look more closely at it.

As he did so, he felt a cold, clammy feeling about his heart, and all those vague suspicions and sensations of alarm which he had previously experienced swept over him again with redoubled intensity.

There was something very strange about this large dark stain in so strange a place.

Claude bent closer over it.

A glance almost showed him what the dark stain was, and he turned away with a shudder of horror.

That dark stain was blood.

Not blood which had been recently spilt, or which could have flowed from his comrade's wounds.

There were no traces of it upon the sheets, but upon the ticking of the bed only.

Moreover, by the yellowish tint it had in places assumed, Claude could tell that it had been there some time.

To satisfy himself, he touched it with his finger, and found just where the stain was the bed was hard and stiffened with the serum of the blood.

What tale did this stain tell?

What deed of horror was it the sole trace and witness of?

Claude could not tell, but the suspicions he had previously and vaguely entertained took consistency and shape.

A murder had been committed in that very room.

Into what kind of place had they got?

Claude was no stranger to the tales which were afloat respecting inns where travellers stayed, and were never seen again.

Such dens of murder were unfortunately too common.

Was there not every probability that he had fallen into one?

Surely, yes.

The strange position of the inn itself.

The forbidding countenances of the two men.

Their strange behaviour.

The plantation at the back, so well adapted for the concealment of any crime.

And lastly, the crimson stain upon the bed.

All these things were confirmatory of such a suspicion.

Claude had a horror of assassination.

For a fair fight he would care little, but he knew very well that such a proceeding as that would be altogether in opposition to the conduct of murderers.

He drew his sword from its sheath and laid it across the bed.

He also examined his pistols, and placed them so that he could take hold of them in a second should any emergency occur.

Then he paused a moment to reflect.

What should he do?

He looked at his watch.

It now wanted about ten minutes to twelve.

Would it be best for him to awake his companion and communicate his suspicions to him?

Sleep and rest for a little while were, he knew, very essential to Jack, so he muttered—

"No, I will not wake him. I will sit here and keep watch, and woe to those who attempt anything against him or me. I am more than a match for a couple of such wretches as those, and, perhaps, after all, there is no occasion for me to be alarmed."

While he spoke these words, Claude Duval seated himself on the bed beside his wounded and slumbering companion.

From this position he commanded a full view of the door.

And now he saw something in connexion with the door which he had not previously noticed.

There were no fastenings upon it, with the exception of a drop-latch, which could be raised with as much facility from without as within.

This, then, could scarcely be called a fastening.

Anxiously, then, and with his heart pulsating rapidly, Claude fixed his eyes upon the door, and stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost.

But the same remarkable stillness of which we have spoken continued.

Nothing would have pleased Claude better than to have taken the candle and gone downstairs, in the endeavour to solve the mystery, but if he did this, he should be compelled to leave his comrade, and during his absence the worst might happen.

So he was forced to content himself with keeping watch where he was.

Slowly and wearily the minutes passed by.

It is always so when one is watching.

At every few moments Claude would take a watch from his pocket and look at the time, but growing tired of that he put the watch upon the bed, so that he could look at it any moment he wished.

Half an hour elapsed.

During that time nothing occurred to recompense Claude for his trouble.

Sixteen-String Jack still slept, but he breathed much easier than before, and a faint tinge of colour was beginning to come back to his cheeks.

Claude looked upon these symptoms with favourable eyes.

"Jack will be all right soon," he said. "Perhaps after all I have been frightening myself with a shadow, or perhaps if they had any evil intentions they would be afraid to engage themselves with us."

It was just as he was making these reflections that Claude heard a faint creaking sound.

He was on the alert instantly, and listened with great intenseness for a repetition of it.

He had not long to wait.

It came again, and this time with much greater plainness than before.

Someone was ascending the flight of rickety stairs leading to the room in which he sat.

Presently the sounds ceased, and then Claude heard some one whispering.

There could be no doubt about what it was.

He did not move from the bed, however, but fixed his eyes still upon the door.

The candle now required attention, but he could not give it. The wick had grown a preternatural length, and the illumination was consequently much enfeebled.

It cast a dim, shadowy light over the chamber.

Suddenly the whispering ceased, and then Claude heard the creaking of footsteps on the staircase again.

On—on they came, until they paused just outside the door.

Here some more whispering took place.

Claude had not the least doubt that there were two persons without, and that those two persons were the men he had seen, and who possessed such forbidding physiognomies.

His mind's eye enabled him to see through the door, and he pictured the two just as they were standing whispering to each other.

What they said, however, was more than he could make out, although he stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost in endeavouring to do so.

The whispering ceased.

A brief interval of silence followed.

Then Claude heard some one tap very gently on the door with his knuckles.

CHAPTER CCCXXXVIII.

THE LANDLORD AND THE OSTLER AT THE "SPOTTED DOG" VERY DERESERVEDLY CAME TO A BAD END.

AFFAIRS in the bed-chamber of the "Spotted Dog" are now beginning to assume a critical and interesting aspect, and it is, we confess, with considerable anxiety and interest that we look for the termination of this adventure.

What could be the meaning of this tap on the door, Claude could not precisely say, but the hypothesis which he adopted was doubtless the correct one.

And that was, that the tapping was meant to ascertain whether he was asleep or awake.

Suppose he feigned the former.

His doubts and suspicions would surely then be confirmed or dispersed.

He resolved upon this course.

As silently as possible, then, he slipped off the side of the bed, taking his weapons with him, and crouched down close to the floor.

The bedstead was now between him and the door, so he was tolerably well hidden from the view of anyone coming in.

The tapping came again, and this time it was a little louder.

Still Claude took no notice.

Then the whispering outside recommenced, after which the latch was slowly and silently raised.

Then the door was pushed open to the extent of a few inches.

Claude raised his head so that he could just see over the bed-clothes.

When the door was open far enough a rough-looking head was projected into the room.

One glance at the features was sufficient to show Claude

that it belonged to no other than the man who he took to be the landlord of the "Spotted Dog" Inn.

It is probable the dim light of the candle rather baffled and confused the intruder's vision, for he put his hand up to his eyes as though to assist his sight.

But he was apparently satisfied with what he saw, for he ventured to step stealthily into the room, and then turned and beckoned to some one without.

Another head then appeared in the doorway. 'This Claude also recognized without difficulty.

It belonged to the man who had played the part of ostler.

It was impossible, having once seen those faces, to mistake them.

"Hush," said the first comer. "Be quiet. I told you they were both asleep by this time. If one was awake do you think he would let the candle burn like that?"

"It has got a thundering long wick, Joe, 'hat's certain."

"Hush, I say."

"I'm whispering."

"I know. But let us get this business settled. We shall be well paid for our work this time. Come on. Never mind about there being two. If they are asleep we can manage them easily enough, and, besides, isn't one almost dead already. Why, it would be doing a good action to put him out of his misery."

"Ah! ah! Joe! you is a rummy one, you is! the idea of that, now."

"We have got the truss of straw and the direction-board to thank for this slice of luck. They little thought we carry it out there every night to get the people here, and bring it away every morning."

"Come on, Joe! Business—business! I know you are always fond of talking about that finger-post affair, because that was your own invention."

"And a good one, too! Ah! ah!"

"Hush, Joe! Let's settle them, and then we can talk afterwards."

"All right, mate."

The two villains, about whose murderous intentions towards their guests there could be no sort of doubt, now produced from their breasts, where they had concealed them, two long bright, glittering knives.

Then, with the stealthy tread of trained assassins, they crossed the room on tiptoe.

They reached the side of the bed.

"Here's one," said the man who had been addressed by his companion as Joe; "but where's the other?"

"All right, I'll be bound! But let us make sure of this one first. We shall then be able to attend to the other."

"Of course we shall!"

The ruffianly ostler raised the hand in which he held the long bladed knife high in the air above the breast of Sixteen-String Jack.

Another moment and it would have descended, and the gallant heart would have ceased to beat for ever.

But that moment was not destined to arrive.

He had not yet reached the end of his career.

Like an armed apparition, Claude rose up from his crouching position to his full height, and no sooner had he done so than, having taken a careful aim, he pulled the trigger of the pistol and fired.

The report of the pistol was something tremendous.

The ostler uttered a yell of fear and agony, and fell in a huddled-up mass upon the floor.

The bullet from Claude's pistol had entered his brain, and killed him instantly.

The arm which had held the knife was now powerless.

Sound as Jack's slumber unquestionably was, the discharge of a pistol within a few inches of his ear was sufficient to break it, and he started up to a sitting posture on the bed as though galvanized.

The landlord of the inn, seeing the fate which had befallen his comrade, and that he was one man opposed to two, turned to flee.

Claude sprang over the bed after him.

In his right hand he held his sword, and in his left the other pistol.

The landlord darted to the door and pulled it open.

He then stood at the top of the flight of stairs.

Claude saw that if he was not speedy in his movements

the man would be off, and being acquainted with all the intricacies of the place would probably escape, or perhaps summon some associate to his assistance.

These were both two very undesirable things indeed, and Claude felt that he must adopt summary means to provide against them.

Accordingly he raised his second pistol and fired.

The bullet struck the landlord in the back, and came out at his breast.

He uttered a dismal yell, and throwing up his arms, fell headlong down the staircase.

So suddenly did all this take place, that Sixteen-String Jack had only just time to get off the bed and come to Claude's side.

What he saw puzzled and bewildered him.

"Claude," he cried, "what in the world has happened? Where am I? Am I mad or dreaming?"

"Calm yourself, Jack—calm yourself. You must not get excited. I will tell you all presently."

Sixteen-String Jack rubbed his head in a very confused manner. He could not make it out at all. He had not the slightest recollection of his arrival at the "Spotted Dog."

Therefore he looked at the dimly-lighted chamber with very peculiar feelings.

Claude was not sure the ostler was dead, so he approached him with the candle to look.

One glance was enough.

The man was quite dead.

He had now to ascertain the condition of the landlord, who he had not heard move after reaching the bottom of the staircase.

The fearful fall he had had without the wound was quite enough to kill any ordinary man, but then Claude knew very well that gentry of his class took, in a general way, a great deal of killing.

So, with the candle in his grasp, he descended the little flight of stairs.

The body of the landlord lay in a huddled-up mass at the bottom.

"Hold the light, Jack," said Claude to his comrade, who had followed him downstairs. "Hold the light, and let us see whether the wretch is really alive or not."

A groan followed these words.

It came from the object at their feet, and at once let Claude know the rascally landlord was not dead.

Sixteen-String Jack, however, took the light, and Claude stooped down over the prostrate form.

It was rather repugnant to his feelings to touch the wounded wretch, but he noticed he was lying in a very peculiar manner, so he mastered his feelings and turned him over with his foot.

The moment this was done, a yell, apparently of dreadful agony, came from the landlord's lips.

It was followed by a gush of blood from the mouth.

Then a spasm of shudder seemed to convulse the whole body.

That was death.

Sixteen-String Jack was so bewildered at what he saw, and so utterly incapable of comprehending it, that he gazed at Claude like a man in a dream.

But Duval, being assured that the two assassins were quite dead, resolved to give him some explanation, which would clear his mind from the mists of doubt which hung over it.

"Come," he said, addressing Jack, and stepping over the dead body of the landlord as he spoke. "Follow me, and I will relieve you of your astonishment and bewilderment. But first tell me how do you feel—*are you better?*"

Sixteen-String Jack passed his hand over his eyes in a bewildered sort of way, as he replied—

"Oh! yes. I recollect now. I was wounded."

"Yes, by the patrol."

"And we escaped."

"Yes, but that is not an answer to my question. Do you feel better?"

"I am very weak and faint."

"I was afraid so."

"But I find myself better each moment."

"Come on, then. A little drop of wine will put you right beyond a doubt."

"But, where are we to get it?"

"I will try to find some."

"I can tell you this, Claude. If I quite understood:

that has just taken place, I should feel very much better."

"Say you so; then I will tell you in a half-a-dozen words."

Claude then rapidly made his companion acquainted with those circumstances which are already well known to the reader, and which consequently do not require recapitulation.

Jack's astonishment was very great.

"I had no idea, Claude," he said, "that such atrocities could possibly be perpetrated."

"Nor I. But from the few words uttered by the two villains, and the stain upon the bed, it is pretty clear they make a regular system of decoying people here during the night, and then murdering them."

"We have had a narrow escape, my friend, and the sooner we get away from this place, I think, the better."

"And so do I; but do you think you are strong enough?"

"I fancy so."

"I am glad to hear that; but still I should recommend you to adhere to my advice, and have a drop of wine—that will give your blood new vigour."

"But where are we to find any?"

"Why, without doubt, there is some in the house, so we have nothing else to do but look."

"Then here goes for an exploring expedition."

"Just so."

"And who knows what else we may find!"

These words were uttered in a tone of deep significance, and as though the speaker quite expected to make some discovery.

"I will carry the candle, Claude," said Jack, "and then I shall at least be making myself useful, if no more."

"Agreed."

In this way the two friends made their way through several rooms on the ground floor, but without seeing anything unusual, and without finding what they sought.

At length, opening a door, they felt a gush of cool air upon their faces, and upon closer examination they found that before them was a flight of brick steps, leading apparently to the cellars.

They hesitated a moment, in doubt whether they should or should not descend and prosecute their as yet unsuccessful search any farther.

Claude made up his mind that the cellar should at least be searched. He was very anxious that Jack should not set out on his return journey to London without a stimulant of some kind.

Accordingly, he called to his companion to follow, and commenced the descent of the steps.

But not until he had his sword handy in his grasp, so as to be prepared to meet any attack that might be made upon him.

The steps were slippery and steep, and, in order to feel sure of his footing, he soon discovered the necessity of holding the wall with his left hand.

The steps were about twelve in number.

The bottom was reached without the occurrence of any accident, and then they found they were standing upon sawdust, with which the floor of the cellar was literally covered.

A number of barrels were now disclosed to view.

It was some time, however, before they found, stowed in a corner, a number of bottles.

Claude took one from the top of the heap; and, as he held it in his hand, a fresh thought struck him—namely, that it would be dangerous to a degree to drink anything they found in that murderden, for fear it should either be drugged or poisoned.

The same thought struck Black-String Jack at the very same moment, for he said—

"Claude, we have had our trouble for nothing: I should feel afraid of drinking anything we found here."

"And so should I, though the thought did not occur to me until just this moment."

"Nor to me."

"Depend upon it, the best thing we can do is to make the best of our way back to London, and the sooner we reach old Matthew's, the better."

"So say I, but do you think you are equal to the journey?"

"Oh! yes."

"Come on, then."

"Where are the horses?"

"I'll be hanged if I know."

"Did you not see them stabled?"

"No; the fact was, I was so engaged with you—for you swooned as soon as you got off your steed—that I never troubled about the horses, but left them to the ostler."

"The chap you shot upstairs?"

"Yes."

"Then I think the best thing we can do is to set about finding them at once, and—But hark, what is that?"

"What—what?"

"Hark!"

CHAPTER CCCXXXIX.

THE POLICE-OFFICERS MAKE A DESPERATE ATTACK UPON THE "SPOTTED DOG."

BOTH the highwaymen assumed listening attitudes, and then there came to their ears with undesirable distinctness a loud knocking, as though some one was hammering at a door demanding admittance.

There could be no sort of mistake about the character of the sound, and our friends looked rather inquiringly in each other's faces as they wondered who in the world it could be.

Bang—bang—bang!

The knocks succeeded each other with a rapidity which spoke well of the flexibility of the muscles of the person who struck them.

It was a simultaneous impulse which made Claude and Jack, without saying a word to each other, rush in the direction of the steps leading out of the cellar.

They ascended them at full speed, the din of the knocking all the while sounding in their ears.

On reaching the bar they hurriedly opened the door leading into the passage which led from the front to the back of the inn.

They were then certain upon a point of which they had had some doubts before, and that was, that the knocking was at the front, or principal door of the inn.

A very interesting question was now suggested to them, and that was, who could those persons be who were outside?

Were they friends or enemies?

They scarcely thought it possible that those officers from whom they had had such a narrow escape, could have tracked them to their present destination.

But, if not, who could those be who demanded admission in so clamorous a manner?

They did not knock like guests.

Very soon, however, all doubts were set at rest as to who the parties were, for the hammering ceased a moment, and then some one said, in a loud and commanding tone of voice—

"Open—open! Open in the king's name. We call upon you in the name of the king, to open this door, and we give you notice that, if you do not obey us at once, we will break in! Open, in the name of the king! We are his officers of police!"

After these words, it was quite a matter of impossibility for Claude and Jack to have any sort of doubt respecting those who were at the front door.

They were police-officers, unquestionably.

They might not be those they had encountered—their errand to the "Spotted Dog" Inn might be wholly unconnected with them, but whether this was so or not, it was quite clear that the best thing our friends could do would be to get away from the ill-omened spot with all possible speed.

This, however would be attended with a good deal of difficulty, for when the police attacked a house like they did this inn, they generally took pretty effective measures to prevent anyone leaving surreptitiously.

And, unfortunately, as we have already described, Claude, upon his arrival, had felt his attention so wholly attracted to his wounded comrade that he forgot the horses, and neglected to perform the necessary duty of seeing where they were housed, and making himself sufficiently familiar with the place to be able to find his way there alone without hesitation or delay.

Now that he had, probably for the first time in his life, omitted this, he realized its full importance.

Could he have only known where the stable was, he felt the rest he would have to do in making his escape



THE GOVERNOR OF NEWGATE VISITS TOM KING IN THE CONDEMNED CELL.]

would be comparatively easy, though in reality such would not be the case.

His ignorance upon this point was, however, as all our readers can see, a very serious matter indeed.

There was not, either, any time for deliberation, for the officers, having repeated their formula and found that no more notice was taken than on the preceding occasions, had set about demolishing the door in good earnest.

It was a strong door, being wholly made of oak, and defended with oaken beams placed horizontally across it, but it was not strong enough to withstand such heavy blows as the police-officers now rained upon it.

At first the blows only sounded like hard knocks, being clear, sharp, and distinct, but they very quickly changed their character, and a crashing noise succeeded.

It was the stout oak door splitting and giving way in all directions.

This was quite enough to unnerve any one, but it was particularly calculated to produce that effect upon our friends.

It was very important that they should not be captured and kept prisoners for a short time even, for if so, then Dick Turpin and Tom King would assuredly perish at Tyburn, for who was there to render them assistance if they were prevented?

And it was having this responsibility upon their minds which made Claude and Jack lose a great deal of that self-possession upon which they so prided themselves, and which was so very necessary to them.

What was to be done?

The door was clearly giving way, and ere many more minutes passed away, the officers would certainly have it down.

Opposite to this front door was another much smaller, one which, from its position, the highwaymen fancied must lead somewhere at the back of the inn.

But, if they opened it, they would probably expose themselves to much danger.

There was a strong probability that a portion of the officers had taken up their positions there.

And yet, on the other hand, they might not have done

so. But what a fearful risk it was to run to ascertain whether they were or not!

Better that, however, than remain where they were with the certain knowledge that the police would be face to face with them in a moment or two.

If any were at the back door, they thought surely they would ere this have demonstrated their presence by making an attack upon it.

They must run the risk.

Having their weapons ready in their grasp, so that, if occasion required, they should be able to make immediate use of them, they quietly drew aside the fastenings which secured the back door.

Then they opened it gently a little way.

There was nothing to cause alarm as yet.

Emboldened by this, they hastily pulled the door wide open upon its hinges, passed out as swiftly as they could, closed it after them, and stood with their backs placed against it in attitudes of defence.

At this moment there was a tremendous crash, which announced the fact that the officers had at last succeeded in breaking down the front door.

Claude and Jack peered eagerly around them, but they could see nothing of the police-officers.

This was a great load off their minds, so, sheathing their swords, they proceeded to make a search among the out-buildings.

The back of the inn, they found, was built close against the large plantation of which we have made mention, and what yard there was had been formed by clearing away a few of the trees.

There were several sheds, apparently of wood, contiguous to the main building, and these the highwaymen very naturally imagined would form the stabling.

Accordingly they directed their steps towards them.

Before, however, they had gone half-a-dozen paces in that direction, a loud voice cried—

“Who goes there? Stand, or I fire!”

Our friends stopped instantly, for the threat just uttered might be the opposite of an unmeaning one.

Looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded, the two highwaymen perceived a dusky figure hastening towards them.

Another voice now uttered the same words, and another form came running towards the fugitives.

The alarm was spreading.

Doubtless, if it came to an encounter, Claude and Jack would have proved more than a match for these police-officers, for such they were; but then the time occupied by the struggle would enable the other officers to come up with them, and the issue of a contest with, perhaps, four times their number would be very doubtful indeed.

There seemed to be no resource but immediate flight.

It was certain they would have to abandon all idea of getting their horses out of the stable, at any rate for the present.

But the plantation was within a few yards of them, and they dashed off in the direction of it at once, for its leafy coverts were well adapted for concealment.

The officers now began to appear in greater numbers, for they had heard something unusual was taking place, though they did not know what.

Quickly, however, they saw the flying forms of the two highwaymen, as well as the course they were taking, and they put forth their speed, not in the endeavour to overtake them, but to intercept them.

But they were too late to practise this manoeuvre successfully.

Seeing this, they called to them to surrender, but no heed was taken of their words, so, fearful of losing their prey altogether, the police-officers drew their pistols and fired.

But the distance was too great for the clumsy, ill-constructed weapons which they carried to be effective, and the bullets crashed harmlessly among the trees.

One more dash, and then Claude and Jack found themselves fairly among the branches.

A sensation of comparative safety now came over them, for among the intricacies of such a place as that the officers would have the greatest difficulty in following them.

The trees grew very close together, and there was, too, an exaggerated growth of underwood.

Both these circumstances impeded their progress greatly.

But they plunged boldly into the recesses of the plantation, quite heedless of the numerous bruises and scratches they received.

The officers fired again, but this discharge was, if possible, more harmless than its predecessor.

And now Claude and Jack began to think that, after all, the loss of their horses was not so serious a thing as they at first thought.

If they had mounted and rode away, the officers would have been very close indeed behind them.

They might not have come up with them, and yet they might have dogged their footsteps into London.

It was quite certain if they had been on horseback they could not have availed themselves of the protection which the plantation afforded them, for the simple reason that it was quite impassable to horses.

So out of these circumstances our friends gathered new hope, and crashed on through the underwood, each moment penetrating deeper and deeper into the plantation, and each moment becoming more and more involved in the darkness which prevailed there.

For this they cared little, because there was all the more difficulty for their pursuers to see them.

They made all speed possible, being satisfied that if they could once get out of the hearing of the police, they should be able to escape from them altogether.

As it was, the loud crashing of the branches and the crackling of the twigs as they forced their way through them, formed a capital guide for their pursuers.

See them they could not, for Jack and Claude could scarcely see a yard before their own faces.

From time to time, however, the officers, as if to show how determined a pursuit they were making, called out to the highwaymen to surrender, and fired their pistols.

But all this was quite useless.

Sixteen-String Jack several times felt his strength fail him, for he was by no means equal to such violent exertion; but each time he felt the sensation of weakness come over him, he shook it off with a vigorous effort.

It is wonderful what capability the mind has of subduing the body to it.

Sixteen-String Jack kept on, and was very little in the rear of his unwounded comrade.

Gradually, to their great relief and joy, they heard the sounds which the officers made in pursuit grow fainter and fainter.

They were either falling off, or else they had taken some wrong direction.

Fancying that it might be the latter, and that the sound of their progress might bring them on the right track again, our friends stopped still and listened.

They could then hear the officers forcing a passage through the dense vegetation which covered the ground.

It was then that Sixteen-String Jack made a suggestion which, from the simplicity of it, is a wonder had not entered their minds before.

“Let us ascend one of these trees, Claude. If we are not seen or heard we shall be quite safe, and we shall be able to remain there until the officers have left the spot. Then we can descend, and act as we may in the meantime determine.”

“Agreed,” said Claude. “That is, I fancy, about the best thing you could do. Ascend first, and I will assist you. I shall not be far behind.”

With this Claude assisted Jack to climb the lower part of the trunk of the tree, and as soon as he caught a fair hold of the branches, he left him to himself, while he began to climb also.

In doing this he was careful to make as little noise as possible, for every moment he could hear the sounds which indicated the approach of the police-officers grow plainer and plainer.

To Claude the feat of climbing a tree was an easy one, and he was soon ensconced among the leaves of an umbrageous chestnut, and seated by the side of his old comrade in arms.

They did not venture to speak, lest the sound of their voices should reach the ears of the police-officers and betray them, nor did they move after having once seated themselves.

With some anxiety and suspense they now stretched their sense of hearing to the utmost.

On came the officers, crashing their way through the trees.

The murmur of their voices presently became heard. It was in vain that the two highwaymen peered down, and strove to pierce the darkness beneath them. It was too intense, and, moreover, the leaves of the chestnut-tree effectually hid the ground from their sight.

CHAPTER CCCXL.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ELUDE THE OFFICERS IN THE PLANTATION, BUT RUN AGAIN INTO THE LION'S MOUTH.

THEY had, therefore, only their sense of hearing to depend upon, and this faculty they stretched to its utmost extent.

Louder and louder grew the sounds, until, at length, the two highwaymen were certain that their foes were actually beneath the tree in which they were hidden.

They were talking loudly to each other, and the highwaymen easily distinguished what was said.

"Stop a minute," said a voice, "it's no good going on like this. Stop a minute, and then, perhaps, we shall hear something of them, for, curse me! it's so dark, there's no seeing a yard before you!"

The police-officers came to a halt, and then there was silence of a few minutes' duration.

They were listening, no doubt.

Claude and Jack took care not to make the slightest movement in the tree so as to attract suspicion towards them.

"I can't hear anything," said the voice which had before spoken, and which, doubtless, belonged to the officer who had some sort of command over the others; "I can't hear anything, and as for hunting for them in this dark place without any clue, why, it's nothing but d—d folly, so let's go back to the inn."

"The place seems as silent as the grave, sir," said another voice.

"It does. The rascals have doubtless hidden themselves somewhere, and if so, we might look for ever without finding them. Follow me. We will go back to the inn, where doubtless we are wanted."

The trampling of feet followed this speech, as the officers turned round to make their way back to the inn.

In a few minutes the sounds of their retreat completely died away, and then Sixteen-String Jack commenced the descent of the tree.

But Claude Duval laid his hand upon his arm, and arrested his further progress, saying as he did so—

"Stop a minute, Jack. It may not be quite judicious to quit our place of concealment so soon. These officers consider themselves artful fellows, and they may have merely made the speech we overheard in the hope of being able to throw us off our guard."

There was some sense in this, so Sixteen-String Jack acquiesced at once, and made no further movement.

But in a low tone of voice Claude Duval addressed him.

"What do you think of these officers, Jack?"

"In what way?"

"I mean, do you think they knew of whom they were in pursuit?"

"No I do not."

"Nor do I."

"If they had, they would not have relinquished the pursuit as they appear to have done. My view of the case is this. The authorities have in some way become acquainted with atrocities which have unquestionably been perpetrated at the 'Spotted Dog,' and these police-officers have been dispatched to take those who were found in the inn into custody, and when they saw us escaping they took us for the rascally gang."

"That is precisely my view of the case, Jack. I don't for a moment think that they suspect who we are, and I feel pretty sure these officers are not the same that pursued us after our encounter with the patrol."

"So am I, or they would have arrived much sooner than we did, for we left no clue behind by which they could follow us."

"Certainly not."

"The officers will find, though, when they enter, that we have been rather beforehand with them."

"They will, indeed. Do you think it will be safe to descend now?"

"We will listen a moment first."

"Agreed."

The highwaymen listened intently for some time, but nothing save the rustling of the tree-tops, as they were dashed backwards and forwards by the wind, reached their ears.

"All is still," said Claude, at length.

"Yes, all seems still."

"Before we attempt to descend, however, I think there would be no harm in considering our position a little."

"I was going to propose the same thing."

"In the first place, then, we ought to get back to London as soon as possible, but how are we to do it?"

"That is just the question."

"We are some distance from town, and I am sure the state of your wounds is such that, after the exertion you have already undergone, it will be impossible for you to walk the distance."

"I fear so; but even if it was possible, we should have to relinquish all ideas of such a thing because of the time it would necessarily take."

"But what are we to do? Our horses are gone."

"Don't you think it possible to regain them?"

"How?"

"By going to the stable, and trying to get them out unperceived."

"That would be running a very great risk."

"I know that; but just think of the advantage that would be gained by it."

"I admit that."

"For my own part, I am inclined to think that as yet the officers are quite unaware of the horses being in the stable, and, if so, we might creep back quietly, enter unknown to them, mount in the stable, and be off at full speed before they are aware of it."

"It is a bold plan."

"But a good one."

"I think so."

"Then let us lose no time in setting about it. Admitting our conjectures to be true, the officers will have quite enough to do in searching the inn, without troubling about the outbuildings."

"Very likely."

"Come on, then, at once, for if we are to make the attempt at all, the sooner we make it the better. As it is, I fear we shall have some ado to reach old Matthew's before dawn."

"I am ready."

"Descend, then, and I shall be glad if you will assist me."

"I shall do that willingly enough, you may depend."

Claude Duval lowered himself easily, and then, catching hold of a branch, swung for a moment and dropped to the ground.

He assisted his wounded comrade also.

Upon reaching the ground, however, they found themselves in rather a serious dilemma.

All around them was as dark as pitch.

In coming from the inn, the two highwaymen had been too much occupied in escaping from their pursuers to take any notice of the route they had taken, and now they found as they stood at the foot of the tree that they had not the remotest idea in which direction the inn lay.

They had turned round and round so often that they had quite lost their bearings.

They stood undecided for a moment, and then suddenly they heard the report of a pistol.

It was no difficult matter for them to say with certainty from which direction the sound came.

What it meant they knew not, but they faced round towards it.

It seemed to indicate the whereabouts of the officers, and as a matter of course, of the "Spotted Dog" also.

In this direction they proceeded, using the greatest possible amount of caution.

How far they had penetrated into the plantation they had no very definite idea, but they felt sure, from the speed they had made, that it must be a considerable distance.

They kept on for some time, nowever in profound darkness, but apparently without coming any nearer to the boundary of the plantation, which they might naturally expect to be indicated by the trees growing at a greater distance from each other.

suddenly, however, the two highwaymen perceived a faint light glittering before them, and after some hesitation, they advanced cautiously towards it.

On a nearer approach they found that this light proceeded from one of the windows of the inn, which was not far off on the left hand of where they stood.

This light formed an excellent beacon for them, and enabled them to make direct for their destination.

At every few steps they would pause and listen.

But hearing nothing alarming, they gathered more confidence.

At length they saw before them, just dimly visible in the darkness, the outlines of the sheds which appeared to belong to the "Spotted Dog" inn.

With the stealthy tread of Red Indians on the war-path, Claude and Jack crept towards these sheds, keeping as much as possible in the dense shadows that fell everywhere around.

To their joy and satisfaction they at last reached them, without having raised an alarm of any kind.

After a time they found a door, which they opened.

As soon as it swung back upon its hinges, the unmistakable odour of stables saluted their nostrils, and convinced them that they had reached their proper destination.

With every confidence, then, they stepped inside and closed the door behind them.

Claude then ventured to produce a light.

He gave it to Sixteen-String Jack to hold, and then looked about him.

He found himself standing in stables of rather a spacious character, and such as one would scarcely have expected to find in such a situation.

There were but two horses in the stalls, and those the highwaymen immediately recognised as their own.

"Look here, Jack," said Claude, as they went close to the animals. "This shows the necessity of always following the plan we have adopted of first of all seeing our horses properly attended to."

And, indeed, the sight before them was ample evidence of the truth of Claude's remark.

The horses had been led into the stables just as they were, and never touched.

They had not been rubbed down, and the mud, with which they were plentifully besprinkled, had caked upon them in large masses.

None of the trappings had been removed. They stood there saddled and bridled, in fact, just as they were when Claude and Jack alighted.

The mangers were quite empty, and it was pretty certain the horses had neither had anything to eat or to drink.

At any other time the discovery of this would have produced a great deal more anger in their breasts than it did; but the fact is, the feeling was submerged in the anxiety they felt to get away.

They turned the horses round in the stalls, and prepared to mount, but, just at that moment, they heard a hurried trampling of feet.

They listened.

The sound approached them.

Dreading the worst, Jack put out the little bit of lighted candle he held in his hand, and ran to the door.

Looking through it, he saw a number of police-officers in the yard of the inn.

They carried lanterns, and one of them extemporized a kind of cresset, such as were used by the watch in olden times.

This diffused a bright ruddy light.

They came in a straight line to the door of the stables, and the only inference to be derived from this was that our friends had been seen to enter it.

Jack did not wait to see any more, but closed the door at once, and rapidly secured it by means of a couple of huge bolts and a swinging bar, which his sense of touch easily enabled him to discover.

This done, he waited rather anxiously for the result.

His apprehensions might be without foundation.

Time would soon decide that.

The officers advanced steadily in a direct line to the stable door.

They reached it in another moment, and then the doubts and fears which the two highwaymen entertained were completely set at rest.

In the first place, they tried to open the door, but finding the attempt a fruitless one, they struck some heavy blows upon it, and called upon those within to surrender.

The two highwaymen seemed now to be in a more perilous position than before.

How were they to escape?

There seemed to be but one mode of egress from the stable, and that was the door by which they had entered, and which was now commanded by their foes.

They remained profoundly still after the officers had called upon them to surrender.

But, if they hoped by this course to induce a belief from the minds of the officers that they were not there, it was a total failure.

The next words that were uttered quite testified this.

"You may as well open the door and submit quietly," said a voice, "because we know you are here, and have surrounded the stable that you cannot possibly escape, so give in at once, and your lives shall be spared."

To this speech Claude and Jack paid no more attention than they did to the other.

The officer who had spoken waited a moment in anticipation of receiving a reply, but finding none came, he cried, in a voice of exasperation—

"Curse them! how much more trouble are they going to give us? I am sick of this sort of work, and I don't mean to put up with it any longer. Down with the door, my men! Down with it! We will capture the rascals either dead or alive. It don't matter a d— to us which. Come on. Down with it!"

A succession of heavy blows upon the door followed these words, which showed that the officers had set about breaking it down in right good earnest.

Leaving them to this work, we will turn our attention to what Claude and Jack were about.

The door was a very ill-fitting one, and in it there were numerous chinks.

Through any of these a tolerably good view of the yard could be obtained.

What they saw was anything but encouraging.

Round the door, in a compact mass, was about a dozen men, all police officers, as their dress fully indicated.

They were armed with various heavy weapons, all of which were well calculated for the execution of the task they had before them.

"What was to be done?"

This was the question the two highwaymen asked themselves as they looked anxiously and inquiringly into each other's faces.

It is probable at this moment, finding themselves environed with so much danger, that they repented of having been so temerarious as to return to the inn after having once got clear of it.

CHAPTER CCCCXI.

THE POSITION OF CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK IN THE STABLE OF THE "SPOTTED DOG" BECOMES CRITICAL.

THE din made by the officers hammering on the door was something terrific, and had a rather confusing effect upon the intellects of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

Just for the satisfaction of the reader we will break off our narrative, and, in as few words as possible, simply state what officers they were who made this attack upon the "Spotted Dog" inn.

We may begin, then, by stating that the two highwaymen were perfectly correct in the conclusions they came to. The errand of the officers to the inn was in no way connected with them.

The fact was, that some rumours of rather a disagreeable character, respecting the proceedings at the "Spotted Dog," had reached the ears of the police authorities, and, having received some rather definite information, they thought it high time to send a force to the spot in order to ascertain whether what they had heard really was or was not the truth.

Hence their arrival in strong numbers, and, finding the front door secured—for the intended murderers had taken the precaution to fasten it—they gave the noisy summons for admission which had reached the ears of our friends while in the cellar.

Before attacking the door in this manner, the officer in command had posted several of the men in various posi-

tions round the inn, with instructions to raise an immediate alarm if they saw any one attempting to leave the premises. →

We have seen how this was done when Claude and Jack endeavoured to cross the yard of the inn.

The officers of police never dreamt for a moment that the two men they were pursuing were no other than Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack; if they had been aware of it, they would have been more energetic than they were.

They were baffled in the intricacies of the plantation, and forced to beat a retreat without having accomplished their errand.

With an audacity that was really wonderful, the two highwaymen returned to the stable.

They were seen to enter it by one of the officers, who had the prudence not to raise an alarm which should reach the ears of those they wished to capture, but hastened off to the chief to communicate the intelligence quietly.

The result of this we have seen.

The officers came in a body, and attacked the door of the stable with a vigour and determination that bid fair to have it down in a very few minutes indeed.

The position of the highwaymen was critical in the extreme.

But they soon recovered themselves from their surprise, and coolly set about making a rapid examination of the stable, in order to find, if possible, some means of egress from it.

In this, however, they were unsuccessful. It was clear there was but one means by which the stables could be entered or left, and that one was commanded by the police-officers.

What must be done? They again asked themselves, and this time with increased anxiety.

To be sure, they might have adopted the desperate expedient of flinging open the door and making a sudden sortie.

But there was so much risk about that course.

Had those who were opposed to them been any other than trained men, or had there been fewer of them than there were, they would unquestionably have availed themselves of this hazardous expedient, but as things stood they rather shrank from doing so.

It was too much to hope that they could succeed in taking these men by surprise, and dashing through their ranks before they recovered themselves.

"I can see but one other chance," said Sixteen-String Jack to his comrade in a hasty whisper; "and I have serious doubts as to the practicability of that."

"What is it? Speak, be quick. Another moment and he door will be down."

Sixteen-String Jack cast an uneasy glance towards the door, and saw that what his companion said was only too true, and that the officers would quickly demolish the only impediment which stood between them and entering.

"Look at the back of the shed, Claude," said Jack. "It seems to me that the boarding is very rotten, and that we might make a breach in it in a few moments."

"What is there on the other side?"

"I have peeped through one of the numerous crevices, and there seems to be a kind of lane."

"What a pity we did not think of that before. Now, I am afraid, it is too late."

"No—no. Do not say that. The door holds bravely upon its hinges, but it is the bar which we put up that does that. Just look at the back of the shed."

Claude hastened to comply with his comrade's request, and found that what he said was quite correct.

The shed was wholly built of wood, and this, in some parts, seemed in the last stage of decay. No doubt this was where the boarding had been more exposed to the influence of the weather.

As Jack had said, there were numerous crevices, and looking through one of these, he saw that the only thing which interposed between them and the narrow lane in which the inn stood was a few rotten wooden planks.

Hope rose in his breast in a moment, and he cried to Jack in a low, but exultant tone of voice—

"We are free—we are free! Lend me your assistance, and in less than a moment we shall have a breach large enough for us to lead the horses through with comparative ease!"

Jack did not require to be told this twice, but proceeded to assist his comrade with the greatest good will.

A vigorous push sent one of the planks flying into the lane, and when one was gone the removal of the rest was easy.

Indeed, the boards gave way before the pressure that was applied to them, just as though they were so much pasteboard, and, in far less time than it takes us to write it, they had made a hole large enough to lead the horses through.

The crashing blows which the police continued to deliver upon the door, effectually drowned the slight noise which our friends made, and they were quite in ignorance of what they were about.

But when Claude and Jack mounted, which they did before they attempted to pass through the breach, they glanced at the door, and saw that it had quite lost its perpendicularity, and that a very few more blows must level it with the ground.

Indeed, this was done before they could properly seat themselves in their saddles.

As the hole was just in front of the door—or rather just opposite to it—the officers saw in a moment what had taken place, and, with a yell of dismay upon their lips, they dashed into the stable.

But the highwaymen were too quick for them.

One touch with the spur upon the flanks of the high-mettled horses made them bound through the aperture in a moment.

Sixteen-String Jack went through first, and Claude Duval followed, but there was so little time between the two actions that any one would have declared they occurred simultaneously.

"Fire—fire!" yelled the officer in command. "Fire—fire! Ten thousand curses! they will escape us yet."

The officers drew their pistols from their belts as hastily as they could, and fired an irregular volley.

It had not the slightest effect, however, for the persons at whom they fired were not within range.

The chief officer appeared to be in a state of great exasperation. No doubt, from the kind of resistance he had met with, the suspicion dawned upon his mind that those of whom he was in pursuit were not exactly what he thought they were.

Having leaped through the hole in the stable, the two highwaymen turned their horses' heads, and sped down the lane at a rate that soon left the "Spotted Dog" behind, and made any attempt of the officers to overtake them quite futile.

The high-road was soon gained, and, without saying a word or relaxing their speed in the slightest, they turned in the direction of London.

There was good policy in thus at once placing as great a distance as possible between their enemies and themselves, because it made pursuit all the more difficult.

They had, too, another motive for making all speed which was quite independent of the last.

It was this.

The many strange adventures which had befallen them upon that most eventful night, had occupied a great deal of time, and, by glancing up at the sky, they could see that they would have very great difficulty indeed in reaching London before it was fairly daylight.

The worst of it was, too, that their horses were tired, and not in condition to put forth much speed, while Sixteen-String Jack was by far too weak to endure any violent exertion.

It is really wonderful, when we take into consideration the nature and extent of the injuries he has received, that he should have borne up against their effects in the remarkable manner he has.

But, then, he had a powerful incentive.

Now, however, that a great deal of the excitement which had been the means of keeping him up had passed away, the reaction commenced, and every now and then a sensation of deadly weakness would come over him, and he would fairly reel in his saddle.

This was in consequence of the immense quantity of blood he had lost.

With regard to the wounds themselves, they were not at all of a dangerous character, and, doubtless, a day's rest at the "White Horse" inn, together with the skilful attentions of old Matthew, would put him all right for the night.

The reader will please to bear in mind that it is now early on Sunday morning—that Sunday preceding the Monday which was fixed for the execution of Tom King.

Time was short, and, as yet, there was very little done towards effecting the escape of the two highwaymen from Newgate.

Still, if all went well they saw very little grounds for apprehension.

More than once Claude and Jack reined in their steeds and listened for any sounds betokening pursuit, but nothing of the kind struck upon their ears.

Every moment now they found it grew rapidly lighter, and yet they were a long way from their destination.

They continued to urge on their exhausted horses, however, and, by means of whip and spur, maintained a tolerable speed.

One thing, it being Sunday morning, people were not likely to be up so early as on any other morning during the week, so they would not run quite so much risk of detection.

On their way to the metropolis they did not meet with a single person, or an adventure worthy of recording.

By the time they had fairly entered London, it was broad daylight.

People were abroad lounging listlessly about the streets and many of them casting inquiring glances at our friends whose appearances were calculated to excite suspicion.

They were covered with mud, and as for Sixteen-String Jack, he was besmeared from head to foot with the blood which had flowed from his wounds.

In this plight they could not fail to attract attention.

According to the arrangement which had been made, our two friends rode up to the front of Montague-house, the spot from which they had started.

Here they found a man waiting for the horses.

He came up to them as soon as they arrived, and assisted them to dismount.

The distance from Montague-house to the top of Drury-lane is very short, and so Claude and Jack soon reached it.

Once beneath the shadow of its houses they felt that they were tolerably safe, for then this thoroughfare boasted even more courts than it does now.

The "White Horse" was reached without any hindrance being offered them.

Both kept a sharp look-out, but they saw no one whose appearance seemed foe-like to them.

They turned down White Horse-yard, and knooked at the secret door. They were necessitated to do this, because the front of the house was closed.

The door was opened almost as soon as their summons was given upon it.

Old Matthew had been on the watch for them all night, and when dawn came without the highwaymen having arrived, he grew agitated in the extreme.

He feared the worst.

His joy at seeing them was proportionally great.

The door was quickly closed behind them.

Refreshments were already laid upon the table in the parlour behind the bar, and Claude and Jack did ample justice to the good things set before them.

Old Matthew had some knowledge of surgery, and he washed and dressed Sixteen-String Jack's wounds in a manner that would have been no discredit to a professor of the art.

They then communicated to him the successful result of their excursion on the highway.

They poured out their booty upon the table before him, and he was really astonished at the amount.

"There will be a devil of a row about this," he said.

"Never mind."

"Well—well, the risk must be run. And now I must beg of you to take my advice."

"What is that?"

"To go and lie down and get all the sleep you possibly can till dusk. I will call you then without fail, and it will be quite time for you to set about your business then."

"Quite time."

"Follow me, then, and get your strength up, for you don't know what you may have to do. Be thankful that you have succeeded so well as you have."

"Lead on, Matthew; we shall be glad enough to follow you; and if, while we are resting, you can get a change of apparel for both of us, we shall be very grateful."

"It shall be done."

Old Matthew led the highwaymen upstairs to a sleeping chamber, and there left them to prepare themselves in the best manner they were able for the startling events that were to happen that night.

The day passed away quietly enough, and without the occurrence of any incident of an alarming or threatening character.

CHAPTEK CCCCXLII.

CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK VISIT THE THIEVES' KEN IN HANGING-SWORD-ALLEY, WHITE-FRIARS.

CONFORMABLY with the promise he had made, old Matthew awoke Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack just as dusk was coming on.

They changed their apparel for some which he had provided for them, and then they descended the stairs and partook of a hearty meal.

While they were discussing this, they talked over their plans, and speculated upon the probabilities of their coming to a successful issue.

"I have ascertained one important fact for you," said old Matthew.

"What is it?"

"Why, that the largest meeting of the 'family' to-night will take place at the 'Jew's Harp,' in Hanging-Sword-alley, Whitefriars."

"Indeed! That bit of intelligence is of the utmost importance."

"I know that."

"We shall certainly proceed there. Until you spoke, we were wondering where we should go, but now you have decided us."

"Just so."

"Do you know what time the meeting is to take place?"

"No, but I should recommend you to get there early."

"We will start at once."

"I think that will be the best plan. You can rely upon the assistance of all the family."

"I am glad to hear that; and they won't have their trouble for nothing."

"Go—go. I am most anxious for this business to be over. If your plans were to miscarry, it would be all over with poor Tom; and if he was to come to grief, I know you would never forgive yourselves."

"I am certain we should not."

"Take every precaution, then. If you fail, Tom King has only fourteen hours to live."

A clock struck the hour of six as Matthew spoke.

"We will do our best, you may depend, and no one can do more. But quiet your apprehensions. In seven hours' time both Dick Turpin and Tom King will be out of Newgate."

A few more words passed, and then the highwaymen bidd old Matthew adieu, for it was very uncertain when they should see each other again.

At a rapid pace, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack made their way from the "White Horse" inn, in Drury Lane, to Hanging-Sword-alley, in Whitefriars.

They said but little to each other upon the road.

Both were busily occupied with their own thoughts, and, moreover, they were fearful of being overheard.

The thieves' ken to which they were proceeding was one of the largest and best known in London, though neither of our friends had ever paid a visit to it.

Still they knew its situation.

With some amount of curiosity, therefore, they looked about them as soon as they had ascended the flight of steps which led into Hanging-Sword-alley.

The place was as dark as pitch, for the alley being narrow, and the houses on each side being very high, a deep shadow was upon the ground.

At first, although they walked up this alley from beginning to end, our friends could see nothing of the "Jew's Harp."

Presently, however, they saw a light appear at the window of a house, the remaining portion of which was in utter darkness.

Towards this they proceeded, and then they saw that it was a public-house.

They had little doubt it was the one they wanted.

The front door stood invitingly open, and there was

nothing whatever which bore a suspicious look about the place.

Upon reaching the bar window, however, they were roughly asked what they wanted.

Claude Duval replied in the peculiar dialect then employed by the thieves in London, and which was as unintelligible to any one not acquainted with it as any foreign language possibly could be.

The countenance of the man who had spoken to the highwaymen underwent a complete change when he heard the few words which Claude uttered.

They were simply an announcement of who they were. But the man's surprise seemed to be succeeded by a kind of disbelief, for he peered closely into the countenances of both.

Satisfied, however, with his scrutiny, he opened the bar-door and allowed them to enter.

He still spoke in the 'thieves' dialect, but, as it would be quite incomprehensible to our readers, we will not trouble them with it, but translate as we go on.

"Do you want to attend the meeting here to-night?"

"Yes," replied Claude. "I have a particular proposal to make to the 'family' with respect to Dick Turpin and Tom King, who are, as I daresay you know very well, at this moment prisoners in Newgate."

The man nodded.

"I think they will relish the proposal, and, moreover, it will not be a bootless one, for all who do anything will be well paid for their trouble."

"That's better. There will be a strong gathering here to-night."

"So we were told."

"By whom?"

"Old Matthew."

"What, the landlord of the 'White Horse' in Drury-lane?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. I have no doubts now."

"Then you have had some?"

"Well, you ought not to be offended if I say, yes. You see, we are obliged to be very careful. The grabs are up to all manner of tricks."

"Of course."

"You are full early. The meeting won't take place for a couple of hours yet. Would you like to wait here, or go at once to the room? A few have arrived, but not many."

"If it's all the same to you, we would much rather go where we are least likely to be seen. The grabs are after us, and have given us a great deal of trouble lately. We had a sharp skirmish on the Oxford-road last night."

"Were you on business?"

"Yes."

"Then you had better go into the meeting-room at once, to guard against accidents. The time will soon pass away, and you will find plenty to amuse yourselves with."

"I don't fear that. We came early purposely."

"Will you follow me, if you please, gentlemen?"

"Willingly."

The man with whom they had had this brief conversation opened a door which led from the bar into an inner apartment.

As soon as our friends had crossed the threshold, he carefully closed the door after him.

The apartment in which the highwaymen now stood was a small one, and tolerably well illuminated by an oil lamp which hung from the ceiling.

The appearance of this place was ordinary enough, and would not have generated suspicion in the minds of any one.

It was plainly furnished, and when they entered, was apparently unoccupied.

The man made no stay in this room, but walked straight across it in the direction of the fireplace, which was placed so as to be opposite to the door.

On each side of this fireplace were two large cupboards reaching from the ceiling to the floor.

They were closed.

It was not exactly to the fireplace that this man went, followed by Claude and Jack, but to the cupboard on the left-hand side of it.

Taking a small key from his pocket, he unlocked this cupboard, and threw the doors open.

A large recess was then disclosed, looking more like a closet than anything else, and quite destitute of shelves.

The back of this cupboard appeared to be formed of oak wainscoting.

All this was quite fresh to our friends, so they looked at all that was taking place with the interest which novelty produces.

The man walked into this cupboard—for so we must call it for want of a better appellation—and going to the back part of it, he stooped and raised the lower half precisely in the same manner as he would have raised the bottom sash of a window.

It slid up into grooves, and there was the creaking of pulleys, which showed that the principle of construction was the same in both.

When the lower half of the back of the cupboard was thus raised, a gloomy-looking recess was disclosed.

"This way, gentlemen, if you please," said the man, as he stepped aside so as to allow them to pass him. "You will find a flight of steps there, and when you have descended them you will find yourselves in the meeting-room."

Claude and Jack stepped into the cupboard, and upon looking more closely at the gloomy recess, they saw that there was indeed a flight of steps leading down into positive darkness.

Naturally enough, they shrank a little from descending. The man noticed their hesitation.

"It's all right," he said. "The stairs are straight and safe. When you get a little lower down, you will see a light."

The highwaymen were forced to content themselves with this assurance, and accordingly they went down the steps.

As soon as both fairly stood upon them, the man who had so far acted as their guide drew down the cleverly-constructed back of the cupboard, and restored it to its ordinary appearance.

Then he closed and locked the cupboard door.

Had they wished to do such a thing, Claude and Jack would have found it rather difficult to effect a retreat.

No such thought, however, entered their minds, and they descended the stairs with a feeling of the utmost security.

Ere long, they saw the light of which the man had spoken.

It was very faint at first, but as they went lower and lower it grew brighter, until at length they found it proceeded from an oil lamp of large dimensions which was hung from the ceiling.

On reaching the bottom of the steps, Claude and Jack saw before them a strong-looking door, which they pushed open at once.

It led into a large department, to which we will devote a line or two of description.

As a matter of course, this chamber was underground; the mere fact of their having descended so many steps as they had was sufficient proof of that.

It was of considerable length, but disproportionately low and narrow.

Down the centre of this place there was a long narrow table, on both sides of which seats were placed.

It was lighted by means of a rude chandelier, consisting of two pieces of wood nailed across each other, and into which candles were fixed.

These were suspended from the roof at uncertain intervals, but as there were several of them, they served to illuminate the apartment tolerably well.

Only two or three people occupied this place when our friends entered, and they were busily talking to each other.

They looked up as Claude and Jack entered, but beyond that they took no kind of notice of their arrival.

They turned back and resumed their conversation.

Claude and Jack sat themselves down close by.

A waiter now made his appearance, and stood before them for orders.

It was said that the best of everything in the shape of drinkables could be had at the "Hanging-Sword" ken, and Claude resolved to test the truth of popular rumour.

Placing a guinea in the waiter's palm, he desired him to bring in a bottle of the best wine there was in the place, and to keep the change himself.

The lad who performed the duties of waiter obtained

the guinea to his pocket with great satisfaction, and soon returned with a bottle of old port, which, upon being tasted, the highwaymen pronounced to be of most excellent quality.

The group of persons who alone seemed to occupy the apartment were talking rather noisily to each other, and Claude and Jack could not avoid overhearing some of the words they uttered.

At first they carried no meaning, but the highwaymen quickly found that the subject of the conversation was the exploits they had performed on the preceding evening.

The account that was given was rather an exaggerated one, and at times our friends could not forbear or control a smile.

The narration, however, was wound up with a piece of intelligence that was quite fresh.

Information of the robbery, and a description of the two robbers, had been forwarded to all the police-officers, and their instructions were to leave no stone unturned and no place unvisited, but, at all risks, to capture these two highwaymen.

It was just as they finished that some fresh arrivals took place, and in less than half-an-hour the huge place was full, which proved the truth of the man's words who said that the gathering would be a large one.

It was a palpable fact that all those who came in cast glances upon Duval and Jack, but beyond this they did not venture to make any recognition, such a proceeding being at variance with the rules of the society.

At last, when all were assembled, the chairman made his appearance, and took his accustomed seat.

There was now some approach to order.

Rising to his feet, the chairman said—

"My pals,—You, as well as myself, I daresay, have been told that there are in our company to-night two gentlemen, who we all feel proud to know are amongst us. You have been told, like me, I make no doubt, that these gentlemen—these ornaments of our profession, as I might call them—have come here to-night with an object in view—with a proposal to make."

"Hear—hear!" cried those assembled, banging their drinking vessels violently upon the table.

"What that proposal is we don't know, but we are very anxious to find out. We shall know soon. Pals all, only this very last night you have heard what a glorious deed these two gentlemen have done. You have heard all the particulars. Well, then, I say we ought to be proud that we have got two such gentlemen in our company to-night."

"So we are—so we are!" shouted the turbulent throng. "Shut up! and let's know what the proposal is."

"Order, pals!" vociferated the chairman. "I hereby call upon the two gentlemen, by name Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, to step forward and state their proposal to the company!"

CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL PROPOSES TO THE "FAMILY" THAT THEY SHALL ATTACK NEWGATE, AND RESCUE DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING BY MAIN FORCE.

A PERFECTLY deafening round of applause followed this last speech made by the chairman.

It was quite certain that the utmost curiosity was felt to know what it was that the two famous highwaymen could have to say to them.

They were impatient to a degree.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack forced their way through the throng until they got to the end of the table, and then the former said—

"Gentlemen,—I beg that the first thing you will one and all do will be to drink up whatever you may have before you, so that I may have the pleasure of treating you all round."

The cheer which responded to these words was something tremendous.

The hearts of all present were won at once.

With the greatest avidity they drained their glasses, and placed them on the table before them in an inverted position to show that they had fairly done so.

"Now, gentlemen," cried Claude, "you are at liberty to call for whatever you like, no matter what it is. There's something towards paying for it."

He flung a heavy purse upon the table as he spoke.

"Punch—punch!" cried everybody, as with one voice.

"Punch be it, then," said Claude. "You shall have enough to swim in if you like."

Punch was a drink always in requisition at the den, and preparations had been made on an extensive scale for the manufacture of a large quantity.

The consequence was that very little time elapsed between the issuing of the order and the steaming drink being placed on the table.

The glasses were all filled, and then the company stood up while the chairman proposed the health of their entertainers.

Of course this toast was drunk with the greatest applause.

As soon as the tumult subsided, the two highwaymen responded, and then Claude said—

"Gentlemen all, fill your glasses again, and fill them this time to the brim, and drink the toast I am about to propose to you."

The glasses were filled, and then, amidst a breathless silence, Claude stood up and spoke as follows:—

"Gentlemen all, the toast I want you to drink is this: May Dick Turpin and Tom King make a speedy escape from the stone jug in the Old Bailey."

Not a sound followed this speech.

The toast was drunk in perfect silence.

The glasses were placed down upon the table without it being broken.

Claude continued.

"By the look of every one of you I can tell that you expect what I am going to say. It is this. Dick Turpin and Tom King are at this moment prisoners in Newgate—you must all know that. You must all know how it was that Dick Turpin was taken prisoner, and confined in one of the cells, so it is not necessary for me to say a word about that."

"Hear—hear!"

"While he was a prisoner, his old comrade, Tom King, anxious to procure his freedom, disguised himself and visited him in his dungeon. But somehow his disguise was detected—he was made a prisoner, and confined in one of the cells also. That was in the cause of friendship."

Murmurs of admiration followed these words.

"You see his design failed. Now, we are the only two friends they had left. We wanted both released from Newgate, but, single-handed, how were we to effect their liberation? We were harassed, too, by the knowledge that we had no time to spare, for to-morrow morning is fixed for Tom King's execution at Tyburn, along with the murderer, Adrian Winberry."

There was a general groan of execration at this announcement.

"Gentlemen all,—The strictest watch is kept in Newgate—the place is trebly guarded. The authorities are determined that these two flowers of our profession shall be at once cut off. But, gentlemen, shall we suffer it? Shall we permit them to have their own way? No, gentlemen; I have a proposal to make to you, and I feel sure you will accede to it. We will do a glorious deed! The stone jug is a disgrace to us—a lasting disgrace! Gentlemen, why should we suffer it to exist? Why should we not level it with the ground? Why should we suffer one stone to stand upon another? Down with it! Down with the stone jug, I say; and we will set Dick Turpin and Tom King at liberty!"

The effect which these few startling words produced, spoken as they were with fiery vehemence, is indescribable.

The fiercest cries came from the tips of those who listened; they rose to their feet and gesticulated violently; but, above all the other cries, came the words, "Down with it—down with it! Down with the stone jug!"

The uproar was perfectly deafening.

It was in vain that Claude Duval held up his hand in an attitude which he spoke his desire for silence.

At first not the least attention was paid to it, but by degrees the turbulence of the assembled company abated, and they turned towards Claude, anxious to hear what further he had to say.

Not, however, until there was the most perfect silence, did he attempt to speak.

"My friends, I think you have caught at the glorious



[THE BURNING OF NEWGATE AND RESCUE OF DICK TURPIN.]

idea which I wished to convey to you, and I think as well that my proposition is very far from being a distasteful one."

"Hear—hear! Hurrah!"

"If you will allow me, however, I will set forth the proposition in much plainer terms than I have done. I will tell you exactly what I wish you to do, and how and when you are to set about it."

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Silence for Claude Duval! Let us hear him!"

Claude, while these words were being uttered, turned round to Sixteen-String Jack, who handed him a bag which was crammed to the mouth with the proceeds of their last night's robbery.

Then he got on to the table, and looked round at the numerous fierce faces by which he was surrounded.

Expectation was the prevailing expression upon all of them.

Claude held up the bag in such a position that every one could see it.

He saw the eyes of the men sparkle as they looked upon it.

When he was sure that every one had looked at it, Claude spoke—

"My friends—you see this bag. It is large—it is heavy. Its contents are the proceeds of the toll which we levied last night upon the passengers in the Oxford coach. That money is destined to be shared equally among you, provided you agree to perform the service I am about to ask of you."

"Hear—hear? Speak—speak! Let us know what we are to do!"

"When I tell you, I daresay you will all be willing enough to bear a share in such a glorious undertaking without receiving any reward for so doing, but the fact of your receiving several guineas each to do something you would be glad to do for nothing, will not abate your ardour, I know."

"Go on—go on!"

"This is the proposal, then. I want every member of

the glorious 'family' to assemble together within two hours from now. I want them to place themselves entirely under the orders of myself and my comrade. We will then lead the way from here to the prison of Newgate, where Dick Turpin and Tom King languish as prisoners in their gloomy cells. When we arrive opposite to this building, which has witnessed the last hours of many a gallant heart, we will rush forward; we will attack it; we will batter down the doors, and force an entrance into its stone corridors; we will release Dick Turpin and Tom King, and all other prisoners who are worthy of liberation."

"Hurrah—hurrah! We'll do it—we'll do it. Lead the way. We'll follow. Down with it. Down with the old stone jug!"

Claude endeavoured to make himself heard, but he found the effort a fruitless one, so he desisted.

Presently, seeing that he had something more to say, the uproar subsided.

Then Claude continued—

"Friends all. This ready and unanimous consent is more than I could possibly have hoped for. I am rejoiced to find you so willing, because willing hearts always succeed in what they undertake. As I said before, we will set free all prisoners now in Newgate, and then, when we have done that, we will level it to the ground. We will not leave one stone standing upon another, and to-morrow morning nothing but a mass of ruins shall show where the prison of Newgate so lately stood."

"Fire it!" cried a dozen voices. "Set fire to it! Burn it down! That's the plan! Burn it down!"

"A good suggestion," cried Claude. "We will free the prisoners, and burn Newgate down."

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

"Are you all agreed, my friends? Do you consent to the proposition I make to you? All those that do, let them hold up their hands."

A forest of hands was immediately shown.

There was not a single person in the room who did not in this way testify their approval of the plan proposed.

Some, in their enthusiasm, held up both hands as high as their arms would let them, while others would have held up both feet as well, if such a thing had been possible.

The feeling was quite a unanimous one.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were much pleased with the result of their efforts. It was far more than they had expected, for they quite thought they should have a kind of battle to fight, and have to use a great many arguments to bring the "family" to a right state of mind.

But they had succeeded without, as one might say, the least trouble.

The fact was, Dick Turpin was an immense favourite with every member of the "family," both great and small.

Had it been for any one else, they would not have been so ready to risk life and limb to do them a service.

There was another thing, too, of which Claude and Jack were in ignorance.

The circumstance of Dick Turpin being a prisoner in Newgate had been frequently spoken upon, and already they had devised several plans among themselves by which they would be able to set him at liberty.

Not one, however, had thought of such a bold, daring, and desperate scheme as that which Claude Duval had just proposed.

They wished to set Turpin at liberty, and would freely have done all in their power towards doing so.

But they considered, at the same time, that to destroy the great prison of Newgate, which was an incubus to so many of them, was a glorious thing indeed.

And then, again, there happened to be at that very moment—as there generally was every session—a great many of their companions inmates of the city prison.

They would have an opportunity of procuring the liberation of these also.

Altogether the caterpillar appeared before them clothed in the most alluring colours.

They had several objects to gain, and they had got two of their leaders who would shrink from nothing.

The chairman of the meeting rose to his feet, and endeavoured to restore something like order.

To a partial extent he succeeded.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must say that the proceed-

ings to-night, although important, have been very irregular—very irregular indeed. It seems, however, that you all quite agree with the proposal made by the two illustrious highwaymen who have honoured the ken with their presence this evening."

"Yes—yes."

"Then we will consider that settled, and say no more about it. In the next place, I wish to call to your recollection the fact that you have been offered a large sum of money to do that which you were quite willing to do without any payment at all."

"Yes—yes."

"Then I have a proposal to make to you respecting that money. In the bulk, it is a very large and handsome sum indeed; but when it is divided it will not amount to much each. Now, if this money was to be put aside we could make a sort of fund of it, and use it in this way. Suppose one of us was to get into trouble, and a good counsel would get us out of why, we could use this money to pay the lawyer's fee."

"I beg to second that proposition," said Claude Duval. "It is a very excellent one indeed, to my thinking."

"Hear—hear," said the remainder, but not in a very vehement sort of way.

Still it was agreed to.

The object was a good one, for, by the means proposed, the money would be made available for a good purpose. But if distributed among all, they would not individually or collectively be any the better for it.

Claude hastened to turn the conversation.

"As for the distribution," he said, "I shall leave that entirely with you. Here is the money. Do with it just as you please. I believe I am right in understanding that you are quite ready and willing to place yourselves under our orders, and liberate Dick Turpin and Tom King from Newgate."

"Yes—yes. We are all agreed to that—every one. We will burn the place down, and set the prisoners free!"

"Exactly. It will be a glorious achievement. Such a one as will never be forgotten. We shall succeed easily enough, because the authorities will never dream we have such a thing in contemplation. We shall have all the advantage which taking our foes by surprise will give us."

"Hurrah—hurrah!"

"You are ready for action, I can tell by your voices."

"We are—we are."

"Good. It is now ten o'clock. In two hours' time I shall want every member of the 'family' assembled. We shall be able to collect together without suspicion. At precisely one o'clock you are all to be opposite Newgate, in readiness for action. We shall be there, and at the word of command you will rush forward, batter down the entrance doors, force your way through the prison, and burst open all the cells. Then, when the prisoners are at liberty, we will set the prison on fire in half-a-dozen places!"

"That's it—that's it. Down with the old jug. Down with it. Don't let us leave anything more than a heap of stones to show where it stood. Down with it. Hurrah! hurrah!"

"More punch!" cried Claude Duval, in such stentorian tones that they rose clear and distinct above the Babel of other sounds. "More punch, and we will drink to the downfall of Newgate."

CHAPTER CCCXLIV.

TAKES A GLANCE AT DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CELLS IN NEWGATE.

WHILE these energetic-looking proceedings for effecting the release of Dick Turpin and Tom King from Newgate are in progress, we will just take advantage of a few minutes to have a peep at them and their doings.

The tide of events has, for some little time past, carried us away from the gloomy old prison, and we now avail ourselves of this last opportunity of returning to it.

It will be recollected that the last we saw of Dick Turpin and Tom King was on the Sunday morning when, after the usual service had been performed, they had been marched back to their cells.

The sermon, which was preached by the reverend ordinary, was what was called a funeral one—it being the custom to bring in the names of those prisoners who were to suffer at Tyburn on the following morning.

Those against whom the sentence was to be carried out were Adrian Winberry, John Norman, Richard Sars, and Tom King.

For the three first-named, warrants had been sent to the prison in the usual and legitimate course, so that was all right enough.

But for Tom King the case was rather different.

The warrant which had been delivered at the time of his former incarceration was still unexecuted and in force, for, as the reader is very well aware, the terms of that warrant were never fulfilled, for Tom King was never hanged.

That, then, was the document, upon the authority of which they proceeded to act, but the sheriffs were of opinion that it ought to receive a fresh endorsement.

About obtaining this it was not expected there would be any difficulty or delay, and there was not, for a messenger very quickly returned with it.

The governor's mind was now quite at ease.

Tom King and Dick Turpin, as we have described in a former chapter, were fortunate enough to obtain a glimpse of each other as they sat in the chapel during service, but they did not exchange any further communication than a glance.

As may be supposed, Tom was in a far from enviable state of mind—indeed, he was in a desperate fidget.

He was annoyed to think that his scheme for seeing Dick, about which he had spoken with so much confidence, should have terminated so unsuccessfully.

He had not accomplished the least good, and had got himself into a very awkward situation.

It was the shortness of time which troubled him most.

He had no idea that the authorities would hurry on his execution in the manner they had, and when he reflected how few hours intervened between them and the hour fixed for his death, a cold clammy perspiration broke out all over him, and he almost gave up all hope.

Then he would think of his friends.

He knew they were staunch and true, and that the nature of his situation would be well known to them.

That they would not stand idly by and see him perish he could have staked his life; but with so short a notice what chance had they of getting up a plan of escape with success?

Moreover, he had not heard a word from his friends outside. The governor took the greatest care that no communications whatever should reach him.

From this it may be conceived that the state of Tom's mind was wretched enough.

He could not turn his thoughts in any direction and rest upon a ray of comfort.

All was blank despair.

He would start to his feet a thousand times, and, despite the great weight of his fetters, would pace up and down the cell with hasty strides, as far as the chain by which he was secured would allow him.

He was distracted.

It was not either so much for his own fate that he cared, nor would he have grumbled if, by becoming a prisoner, he could have procured the liberation of his friend; but it was so aggravating to think that he had not bettered Dick's position in the least degree, and yet he had thrust his head into the halter.

At length his thoughts began to assume a more settled form, and it was fortunate they did, for, if his present state of mind had continued, he would certainly have gone mad.

The conclusion to which he came was this.

He must by some means or other get his execution postponed for a week.

"I will protest against being hurried out of the world like this. It is too bad. I will send for the governor. I will speak to him, and try whether I cannot get it put off. Why, a week will make all the difference in the world to me. That must be it. I must have a week's grace. Now for the governor."

Tom King had arrived at a decision, and he felt all the calmer in consequence, but those who know the disposition of Mr. Cawthorn will, we think, come to the conclusion that the chances of obtaining a week's delay were very slight indeed.

However, Tom was rather hopeful in the matter.

His chain would not permit him to reach the door of his cell, or else he would soon have made such an uproar

by battering upon it, as would have brought all the officials in the prison to know what was the matter.

Some other means must be adopted, because, for the reasons mentioned, it was quite out of the question.

Tom knew there was a turnkey stationed in the corridor, but how to attract his attention was the difficulty.

He knew from experience that it was no good to shout. He might bawl himself hoarse for all the notice that would be taken of it.

Just within his reach, however, was a stone pither, in which his allowance of drinking water was placed.

That gave him an idea.

He picked it up and drank heartily of its contents.

Then what water there was left he poured out on the floor of the cell and allowed it to flow away.

He next took the empty pitcher in his hand.

It was very heavy.

He swung it backwards and forwards, so as to give it an impetus, and then, letting go, it went with full force against the door of the cell, and was broke into a thousand fragments.

The crash was tremendous, for the door was lined with iron.

Scarcely had the sounds died away than Tom was rewarded for his expedient by hearing the trampling of footsteps in the passage.

The next moment the door was flung open, and the governor of Newgate, with a turnkey at his back, appeared upon the threshold.

The look of half-fear, half-curiosity which was depicted upon his countenance when he first appeared, quickly changed to one of anger.

"What do you mean by such violent conduct as this?"

"I wanted you," replied Tom, coolly, folding his arms.

"Wanted me?"

"Yes; and, as I knew it was no good to call out, I adopted this means of arresting your attention."

"Oh! indeed."

"I hope you won't be offended, Mr. Cawthorn; but, the fact is, I want to speak to you upon rather a serious affair."

"Oh! very well. Say on—say on. I am bound to listen."

And the governor, as he spoke, assumed his favourite attitude, which consisted in placing one hand behind him and the other in the bosom of his vest, while he swayed gently to and fro upon his heels.

"Mr. Cawthorn," began Tom, "I want to know whether to-morrow morning has really been fixed for—my execution?"

The governor grinned.

"Well, yes; it has," he said.

"But you cannot be in earnest. You do not intend to carry such a monstrous thing into effect?"

"Indeed we do, though."

"But I protest against it."

"Protest, then."

"Mr. Cawthorn, I appeal to you as a man. Is it right for me to be brought suddenly into this cell, and told that I must perish so soon? It is monstrous. What time is there left for repentance?"

The governor looked into Tom's face with a comical expression, which, under any other circumstances, would certainly have provoked a smile upon the lips of the prisoner.

"Now, Mr. King,"

"What?"

"You must think me jolly green——"

"No—no."

"I say yes. You must think me jolly green, or you wouldn't try on a dodge like this. It's no good. You will find it won't answer. So say no more."

"What dodge?"

"Why, trying to get your execution delayed. Now listen to me, and I will give you a few words of friendly advice. Abandon all thoughts of obtaining any postponement of your execution. You may just as well, for we don't intend to allow you the ghost of a chance to escape, if we can help it. Do you understand that? Let me advise you, then, to occupy your time between now and to-morrow morning in the best way you are able, for I can assure you you will not cheat the gallows this time."

"It's a monstrous piece of iniquity, then."

"I daresay it is, in your judgment, but it is quite the

reverse in mine. I have got your warrant indorsed, so that will be all right. Every preliminary has been arranged, and to-morrow at this time you will be dangling at the end of a rope on the triple tree at Tyburn."

With these highly consolatory words upon his lips, the governor turned round and passed out of the cell.

The turnkey hastened to close the door.

As soon as it was shut, Tom sank back upon his seat.

"That is over. They are determined to kill me. They have resolved that I shall die. But something or other comes over my mind like a conviction that I am not yet at the end of my career. Claude and Jack are at liberty and doubtless doing all they can for us, and I will not lose hope until the very last moment, and even then I shall not quite lose it, for I shall remember how narrow an escape I had before."

Tom put his hands to his throat as he spoke.

He always felt an uncomfortable sensation there whenever he thought about his little adventure at Tyburn.

Tom King little dreamt what very energetic measures his two old companions in arms were taking, and how well calculated those measures were to insure success.

He was forced to content himself with the reflection that they were doing all they could for him, and that they would not let him perish if they could avoid it.

And so the remainder of the Sunday passed.

It was a dreary, wretched day for him.

From Tom King we will turn our attention to the hero of our story, Dick Turpin, who lately has not received so much notice as he ought to have done.

We may simply state that he still remained on the same good terms as heretofore with the officials of the prison.

His life was rather monotonous, and there were few incidents indeed to disturb it.

He passed the greater part of his time alone in his cell.

Few people are calculated mentally to endure a life of solitude, and most certainly Dick Turpin was not one of that number.

His was a convivial, jovial spirit, and he was never so happy as when surrounded with plenty of his fellow-creatures.

Such being the case, his solitary confinement preyed somewhat heavily upon his mind, nor could he prevent its doing so.

Then he had heard but little intelligence of a cheerful character.

The news that Tom King's clever disguise had been detected by the governor, and that his old comrade had been taken prisoner and lodged in one of the cells, very quickly reached his ears.

He felt much concerned with respect to his position, for he also heard that there would be no delay in issuing a fresh warrant for his execution, but that they would proceed by virtue of the old one, which they alleged was in full force.

Later still, in order to preclude all possibility of a hitch in the business, he heard that the old warrant had been freshly indorsed.

Dick could not forbear a shudder when he was made acquainted with all these preparations for hurrying his comrade into eternity.

His soul revolted at the indecent haste.

Too well he knew the cause of it.

Luckily Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were aware of their incarceration, and they might render efficient aid, but Dick was one who never placed much reliance upon any one's help but his own.

During the whole of Sunday he was to the full as anxious and restless as Tom King himself, and he counted every minute that would elapse until the time arrived for his companion to be taken to Tyburn.

At length night came.

That night which the authorities had fully determined should be the last that Tom King should pass on earth.

Whether they were doomed to disappointment or not we shall very quickly see.

As the different objects in his cell faded from his view, and darkness came stealing on, Dick Turpin sprang to his feet.

"This will never do," he said. "Surely the damp of this cell have struck a chill to my heart. But I will shake off the feeling. Surely I yet possess some portion of that energy for which I was once so famous. I will summon to my aid what I have got left. Tom King must not

perish while I live. I will free him, or perish in the attempt."

It was something with his old manner of speaking that Dick Turpin pronounced these words, and when he had uttered them he felt a fresh accession of vigour fill his whole frame.

"I have been here long enough," he added. "The iron will eat so deeply into my soul if I stay here any longer, that I shall never be able to recover myself from the effects of it. I must escape. Yes, that is it. I will be free from these stone walls, and I will not place myself under an obligation to any living person for it in favour. I will be free, and that by my own unaided exertions; and when once I stand in the corridor on the outside of this cell, I will wager my life that, ignorant as I now am upon the subject, I shall not be long before I find out in which cell my friend is confined. Then, when I have made that discovery, few minutes will elapse before he is freed from it, and then it will be hard indeed if we are not able to force a way out of Newgate after having accomplished this much."

CHAPTER CCCXLV.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN BREAKING OUT OF THE NEW-GATE CELL, AND HAS A STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE PAVED YARD.

THERE was a wild excitement in Turpin's manner as he uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded, and, when he ceased, he drew himself proudly up to his full height, and seemed to breathe defiance to all the numerous dangers which environed him.

It required a man of no ordinary stamp to boldly look such peril in the face as he did.

There was no vapouring—no idle boasting. His words exactly expressed his meaning, and no more. There was no one to hear what he said—indeed, he was unconscious of having spoken aloud. He merely uttered his own inmost thoughts.

But what man, unaided by tools, or any other person, could hope to accomplish that which Dick had so daringly projected?

Not one, unless he had as powerful a motive to urge him on to make the utmost exertion as he had.

Not only was he striving for his own life and liberty—and it is well known what powerful incentives these are—but he was striving for the life and liberty of his friend, who, he felt certain, without his aid would most assuredly perish before the sun that was so soon to rise had crossed the meridian.

It was, however, easy enough to make such resolutions as Dick had; the difficulty was to carry them into practice.

Dick glanced around his cell as well as the obscurity which prevailed in it would permit him.

But his eye rested upon nothing that looked at all likely to aid him.

The movable objects were very few, and those that did exist were unwieldy and unserviceable.

It was not, however, because he was in search of anything that Dick glanced round the cell.

It was merely to ascertain how far the night had advanced, and to judge as near as he could what time it was.

He had been the inmate of that gloomy cell for a sufficient length of time to be able to tell with tolerable accuracy, by the deepening shadows on the wall, how much of the night had gone.

"I must pause awhile," he muttered. "I shall do no good by beginning yet. The turnkey will make his last round in a few minutes, and then I shall be able to commence operations with the certainty of not being disturbed."

With these words Dick Turpin sat down upon the rude stone bench which served him for a bed.

Scarcely had he done so, than his quick ears caught the well-known sounds of the turnkey's footsteps in the corridor without.

He threw himself back upon the bench in an attitude of assumed indifference.

Slowly the numerous and ponderous fastenings of the cell door were withdrawn, and the heavy door grated back upon its hinges.

But it was only opened wide enough to allow the turnkey to project one hand and his head into the cell.

In this hand he carried a lantern, and he flashed the light of it about him, until at last its rays fell upon the form of the notorious highwayman.

Dick pretended to be aroused by the light falling on his face, and, rising to his feet, he said in a cheerful voice, as he was wont to do—

"Is that you, Parker?"

"Yes. Mr. Turpin; it's me."

"All right. You roused me out of a bit of a nap, I fancy. I suppose you have come to see that all is right for the night?"

"Yes."

"Take a look round, then; for I feel very sleepy to-night."

"Oh! I don't want to take no look round, Mr. Turpin. It's all right, I know. It's a mere matter of form—one of the new-fangled regulations that have lately been made in the prison."

"So I believe."

"Good night, Mr. Turpin."

"Good night, Parker. I hope I shall be able to get a few hours' rest."

"So do I, sir. It's a shame you are here. But I can't help it. Good night. Good night."

With these words on his lips, Parker, the jailer, who had not only a friendly feeling towards Turpin, but admiration and respect for him as well, closed the door and carefully refastened it.

Dick Turpin was once more alone.

No sooner did the door close than he sprang silently towards it, and listened with feverish impatience to the replacement of the fastenings.

Listened as no one else but a man similarly situated to himself could listen.

To him every creak had an interest and was full of importance.

Those bolts which the jailer so easily slot into their sockets would take him hours to remove, and it was also very necessary for him to know what fastenings he would have to contend with.

First there was the lock.

There could be no mistake about the sharp snap with which it shot into the box provided for it.

Then there were the two bolts at the top and bottom of the door.

He heard those slowly worked into their sockets.

And, lastly, the ponderous iron bar which the turnkey could scarcely lift—for its strength was considered in proportion to its weight—was placed in its staples and securely fixed.

Then the jailer retired.

From the inner side of that door who could hope to be successful in removing those fastenings which was only done with difficulty by the man outside.

But Dick was not disheartened by the prospect he had before him.

None of the obstacles were new ones.

They had existed from the first, and he was acquainted with them all.

Soberly and steadily he set about removing them.

In the first place he groped his way to an obscure corner of the cell, and picked up something small, which he had doubtless placed there for security.

Had there been a light in the cell, it could have been seen what that object was.

It was a knife.

Such a knife as is commonly used at table.

It had come into Dick's possession in a very simple manner.

In former chapters we have related at full length how he had his meals brought to him in the cell, how he paid for them himself, and how he invariably invited the two jailers to eat with him.

This had been done so frequently, that what little caution the men at first exercised was relaxed—whether purposely or not would be hard to say.

However, on the preceding day Dick saw an opportunity of secreting the knife, which he had used to eat his dinner with, and he could not resist the temptation of availing himself of the opportunity, for he thought the time would come when that knife would be of inestimable value to him.

We are inclined to think that the turnkeys were aware of his having abstracted it, but they said nothing.

At any rate, it is quite clear that the knife must have been missed by them.

But although it was a good deal to be possessed of a strong table knife, yet it seems but a poor and inefficient instrument wherewith to effect an escape from a cell in Newgate.

And yet that was the sole tool which Dick possessed, and he not only hoped to escape, but had determined at all hazards to do so.

We will observe his proceedings.

Having taken the knife in his hand and felt the strength of the blade by bending it, Dick crossed his cell again in the direction of the door.

By this time the interior of the cell was involved in darkness, and none could see where the door was situated; but Dick walked direct to it in the dark, so familiar had he become with the topography of his dreary cell.

As he well knew, the inner side of this door was covered with sheet iron, which was riveted on to the woodwork of which the door was composed in such a manner as to leave no part of the wood visible.

The lock was still further protected by another independent plate formed of such well-tempered steel that no drill could penetrate it.

Dick Turpin sunk down into a kind of sitting posture close to the bottom of the door, and began carefully feeling the iron plating with his fingers.

It was well secured in every part.

Undaunted, however, by this, he took the knife, and after many efforts, succeeded in introducing the blade between the iron plate and the door itself.

He considered this a great deal done, and he proceeded with greater confidence to execute the remainder of his task.

That was, to raise one corner of this sheet iron, and gradually lift it up until a sufficiently large portion of the woodwork was exposed to enable him to cut a hole through it.

But he soon found this to be utterly impracticable.

The knife was not strong enough to move the rivets.

A small strong crowbar would have been required to do it, and he possessed no such instrument.

He bent the blade of the knife until he was afraid to do so any longer, for fear it should break off close to the handle, and leave him weaponless.

He paused in his operations.

What should he do?

He was loth to relinquish this means of making his way out of his cell.

He was reluctant to confess to himself that he had failed at the very outset of his undertaking.

But such was the case.

He left the knife sticking where it was, and gave himself up to thought.

Mechanically he raised his eyes to the little grated aperture in the wall which did duty for a window, and which could be distinguished from the black wall of the cell by the faint light which appeared behind it.

The aperture was small, very small, and it was strongly defended with iron bars.

Still, as Dick looked up at it, and then thought of the iron-plated door and the massive stone walls, he thought surely it must be easiest to make a way through here.

Dick knew where that grating looked to.

It was into one of the paved yards of the prison.

He had ascertained that by placing the table under the window and a chair on the table.

By standing on the chair he was enabled to look through the bars.

But he had noticed how firmly they appeared to be fastened in their settings.

Still they did not now seem such impassable barriers between himself and freedom.

Abandoning all hope of being able to remove a small portion of the iron plating on the door, Dick withdrew his knife from the crevice in which he had taken so much trouble to introduce it, and placed it in his bosom.

Then he moved the table, and placed it just beneath the window, and then he put the chair on the top of the table.

To ascend these was a matter of no difficulty.

In another moment Dick was looking out through the grating into the paved yard before him.

It was surrounded by high walls, and very little of its general appearance could be distinguished.

As it happened, however, that was a matter of very little importance, for Dick was familiar with the place.

While he looked through the grating, preparatory to taking any more decisive steps, he heard St. Paul's strike the hour of midnight.

The sound was taken up in a jingling fashion by the various churches in the vicinity.

At length the echoes of all died away, and then Dick was startled by hearing a footstep in the yard before him.

He drew back a little way from the bars, but looked down with eagerness and curiosity.

Who could it be?

The mystery was quickly solved.

The sound of the footstep grew louder and louder, and then Dick saw a faint light like a small star.

He comprehended all instantly.

It was one of the prison watchmen making his round.

Dick looked at him with increasing attention, and, by straining his vision to the utmost, managed to make out the outline of the man's form.

He strolled across the yard in a sleepy, negligent sort of way.

When that man was first set that duty he had performed it in a very different manner.

He had flashed his lantern about him, and looked into every corner, not leaving one unvisited.

But, after a time, he grew rather tired of this, for it never resulted in anything, and, as a matter of course, carelessness followed, until he had taken to strolling through the yard in the semi-somnolent state we have described, and not paying attention to anything.

But this is always the case.

Dick watched this man cross the yard and then disappear through a small door in the wall.

Dick now considered he should have the coast clear for a little while.

Taking the knife from his bosom, where he had placed it, Dick Turpin, with the greatest patience, began to pick away the mortar surrounding the stones in which the bottom bars of the grating were imbedded.

The operation was a tedious one, but not half so tedious as he expected to find it, for the mortar was either not of first-rate quality, or else the weather had had an undue effect upon it.

It was softened considerably, and Dick picked it out in large pieces.

For such a purpose as this the knife which he held in his hand was most admirably adapted, and before the various churches chimed the hour of half-past twelve, he had loosened the whole of the bottom row of stones.

He placed the knife once more in his bosom, and, taking hold of the stones with both hands, he exerted his utmost strength and drew them towards him.

At first the iron was obstinate, but the leverage power he had got was great.

The bars bent at the top.

Encouraged to no ordinary extent by the amount of success which had so far attended upon his efforts, Dick redoubled his exertions.

Another half-hour passed.

The clocks struck one.

At the expiration of that time he had so twisted, bent, and broken the iron bars that there was room enough for him to pass through the aperture.

With his heart beating high with hope, and his whole frame in a state of the greatest possible excitement, Dick Turpin prepared to make his descent into the yard.

This was no easy matter.

But while thus engaged his ears were assailed by a strange sound, the like of which he never remembered to have heard.

Instinctively and involuntarily he paused to listen.

The strange sound continued.

It increased in force and intensity.

CHAPTER CCCXLVI.

RELATES DICK TURPIN'S ADVENTURES IN NEWGATE WHILE DISGUISED AS A WATCHMAN.

FOR a few moments, so absorbed was he in what he heard, Dick Turpin forgot where he was and the peculiar position he occupied.

All his thoughts and faculties were concentrated in the sense of hearing.

He was intent only to catch every sound.

For a very short time did he remain in ignorance from whence those sounds proceeded.

It was from the Old Bailey.

Dick Turpin knew this because in the afternoon a faint-reflected beam of the setting sun used to make its way into his dungeon through the grating at which he now stood, and from this fact he knew that he must be facing the west.

And, if he was facing the west, he must of a necessity be facing the Old Bailey, for that street runs from north to south along the west front of the prison of Newgate.

It was from the street, then, that Dick Turpin felt confident that the sounds came.

And those sounds.

There was no mistaking their character or nature.

They were produced by the trampling of many hundreds of feet.

The murmur of many hundreds of voices, none of them speaking, perhaps, much louder than a whisper.

Evidently a large body of people was assembling in the Old Bailey.

But for what purpose?

In the present day, when malefactors are executed in front of the prison, such a question would be easily enough answered.

On a Sunday night, when a hanging is to take place on the ensuing Monday morning, it is no uncommon thing for a crowd to assemble.

But at the time when Dick Turpin lived, and for a very long time afterwards, prisoners were not executed in front of Newgate.

Such a thing had never been thought of, nor the device of a movable scaffold either.

In those days the executions took place for the most part at Tyburn.

The condemned men were wined, placed in an open cart, attended by a powerful escort, and drawn to Tyburn.

Now, it was at this last mentioned place that people might be expected to collect early and in large numbers.

To be sure there was always a crowd to see the procession start, but then its size was insignificant compared to the other.

Knowing all this, Dick Turpin was at a loss to think why the crowd had assembled there at such an early hour.

And such a large crowd, as from the sound he felt quite sure it must be.

Dick was compelled at last to give it up in despair.

He turned his attention to the business he had under hand.

Little did he imagine that the crowd he heard collecting had so intimate a connexion with him and his fortunes as it really had.

Little did he think that it was owing to the exertions of his true and well-tried friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, that the crowd had been drawn together.

Still less did he think that he was taking all the trouble he had been taking and was about to take for nothing; that he would have been released if he had been content to sit quietly in his cell and await the coming of his liberators.

Of all this he was in the most profound ignorance.

He considered the crowd had no connexion with him whatever, and therefore he bent all his energies to the task he had under hand.

It was by no means an easy matter, now that the bars were removed, to pass through the small aperture and descend into the yard outside, which was several feet lower than the floor of the cell.

After some trouble, however, Dick succeeded in thrusting his feet through, and then he gradually lowered himself to the ground.

In another moment he was standing on the stones in the yard.

He drew a long breath of relief, and fancied he was already free, though actually he was as far off freedom as ever, or so nearly so as not to make much difference.

Still he felt that he had achieved a great deal, and felt stimulated accordingly to do still more.

Dick glanced around him, and endeavoured to take in the general aspect of the place in which he stood.

He could only very dimly see about him.

Suddenly, however, he heard a faint rattling noise, for which he could not at first account, and then all at once he knew it was caused by some one rattling a key in a lock, as though attempting to unfasten it in too great a hurry.

The moment he made this discovery, Dick drew back into the shadow of a wall.

He had scarcely done so than a door close to his left hand was opened, and the same watchman as he had seen a little while back cross the yard, again made his appearance.

Dick watched him close the door through which he had just passed, and then an idea entered his mind which he lost not a moment in carrying out.

Watching his opportunity when the back of the watchman was turned towards him, Dick sprang forward and grasped him tightly by the throat.

So tightly did Dick grasp him that, though the watchman made a desperate effort to cry out, he failed to articulate a sound.

"Silence!" exclaimed Turpin, between his teeth; "silence, and your life will be spared. If you make the least sound you are a dead man."

The watchman appeared to collapse upon hearing these words.

He dropped his lantern, but fortunately it fell upon its bottom, and preserved an upright position, so that it was not broken.

With great dexterity and swiftness, Dick pulled off the watchman's hat and great coat and threw them on the ground.

This done, he pulled off his cravat, and, with the aid of this, tied his hands behind his back.

Dick now released his hold of the watchman's throat, and he took immediate advantage of that circumstance to utter a sepulchral sort of howl.

"Oh! you won't be quiet, won't you?" said Dick. "Then I must try if I can't make you. I haven't a gag at the present moment, but this will answer the purpose quite as well."

As he spoke, he made a snatch at the short stick, or alougeon, which the watchman carried, and gave him a rather sharp crack on the head with it.

The man fell down in a moment in a state of insensibility.

"You would have it," said Dick; "and, now you have got it, I hope you like it."

With this philosophical remark, Turpin dropped the stick, and proceeded to attire himself in the watchman's great coat and hat.

When he had put on these articles of apparel, the change in his appearance was very great indeed.

A feeling of much greater security now came over Dick's mind, and his hopes of being able to achieve his design increased in a proportionate ratio.

He had certainly a much better chance of getting through the prison unnoticed.

But Dick did not stop with the appropriation of the coat, hat, stick, and lantern.

He went to the body of the prostrate watchman, and after searching nearly all his pockets, produced a bunch of keys.

They were the only things he thought it was worth while to take away with him.

Thus armed, Dick Turpin, with a bold and confident step, took his way across the yard.

He found the lantern a most useful and agreeable companion.

He flashed the light round him fearlessly enough, because he knew that if it was seen no suspicion would be excited.

Now Dick did not think it would be altogether prudent to go through the doorway which the watchman had just entered the yard, so he looked about him for some other means of leaving it.

On the opposite side he found a door of similar appearance.

He held the light close to the keyhole, in order to judge of the size of key he should require, and then proceeded to select one which from its size he thought was likely to fit.

He was so lucky as to hit upon the right one the first time.

He had the door open in a moment, and he closed it rapidly after him, of course taking the precaution to lock it.

Looking round him, he found himself in a sort of corridor, or passage, at the extremity of which was a flight of stone steps.

Now he had entered this passage and closed the door, the noise made by the mob in the street became inaudible.

To, this, however, Dick attached very little importance indeed, being still under the impression that the assemblage had nothing to do with him whatever.

There were no doors opening from the passage in which Dick Turpin now found himself, and so he hastened along it with all possible speed.

Ascending the steps of which we have made mention, he found his further progress was barred by a door.

This was now no obstacle to him, and he opened it easily enough by means of the bunch of keys.

He then found himself in another paved yard. This sort of thing was not what Dick wanted.

He wished to gain the interior of the prison, and not keep hovering about the outworks.

However, taking all things into consideration, he had not much to grumble about.

Again, however, there came to his ears, and this time with much greater distinctness than on the former occasion, the uproar produced by the mob in the street.

This might proceed from two causes.

Either he was much nearer to the Old Bailey, or else the noise had increased.

Dick was inclined to think the latter.

At this moment St. Paul's chimed the half hour past one.

Time was speeding on, and Dick felt that he had a great deal to accomplish.

Going close to the wall in this second paved yard, he walked completely round it.

He counted no less than five doors.

One of these unquestionably led into the street, and into the Old Bailey, too.

That door was the only barrier between him and liberty.

Indeed, it could scarcely be considered a barrier, for that word implies something which would have to be difficultly surmounted.

But there could be no possible difficulty for Dick to pass through this door, because the bunch of keys he held in his hand would most certainly have furnished him with the means of passing through it.

His life was in danger.

He had but to make one step and be free.

The temptation was a great one, and no one, without they stood in the same position as Dick Turpin, could say how great a one.

But if he availed himself of this means of escape, he must abandon his friend to his fate.

The idea of doing this never entered Dick's mind for a moment, and he turned away from the door without a feeling of regret.

Back into the jaws of danger he went with a steady tread.

From the door opening into the Old Bailey, he could command a tolerable view of the prison of Newgate.

He walked straight across the yard to a door which, from its situation, he imagined would lead him direct into the prison.

Oh! how he wished he had found Tom King, and that instead of standing there alone as he did, that his old comrade was with him; how easily then could they have effected their escape, and laughed to scorn all ideas of pursuit.

But such was not to be.

Just as Dick was about to introduce the key into the lock, he was startled by hearing a hoarse sort of cry from the mob outside.

What it portended he knew not.

It was followed by the rapid rush of many feet, apparently in one direction.

Then there came a tremendous battering noise.

Dick was surprised, but not for one moment did the faintest glimmer of the real truth dawn upon his mind.

But the reader, from the facts of which he has been put in possession, will be at no loss to understand what these sounds meant.

Passing through the door, which he closed and locked after him, Dick Turpin raised his lantern, and found himself in a kind of vestibule or lobby.

This place was dimly lighted, and at a glance our friend saw several doors opening from it.

Dick did not doubt now that he was on the right track, and that the doors he saw before him led into the corridors from which the cells opened.

No sooner, however, had he closed the door and advanced a pace or two, than a man rose from a seat upon which he had been sitting, and said—

"Hullo! Wilks, what the devil are you doing here? Your post is on the outside of the prison."

Here was a dilemma.

Dick had encountered one of the watchmen, in whose bosom at present it was tolerably certain there was no suspicion.

But how was Dick to act?

As soon as this man found out the mistake he had made, he would raise an immediate alarm.

If Dick retreated through the door again, suspicion would be roused.

If he advanced he would be detected.

Upon the spur of the moment, he adopted the only course that appeared to be open to him.

Assuming a very mysterious aspect, he beckoned to the watchman who had questioned him, and at the same time advanced in a cautious stealthy manner.

The deluded watchman quite fell into the snare thus laid for him.

He thought that something peculiar had come under his notice, and that he wished to impart it to him.

Full of expectation, and quite unsuspectingly, the watchman allowed Turpin to come close to him.

To his great surprise, however, the seeming Wilks raised the short thick stick he carried, and brought it down upon his head with such force and suddenness that he fell to the ground insensible, without having time to utter a sound.

"I could not help it," said Dick. "I could not stop at trifles, and that bit of a crack on the head won't do you any harm, I know."

As he uttered these words he heard a tremendous crash.

Then a bell began to toll most distally.

It was the alarm-bell of Newgate!

CHAPTER CXXLVII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING HAVE A NARROW ESCAPE OF BEING BURNED TO DEATH IN NEWGATE.

LEAVING Dick Turpin in his very peculiar position, we will just turn our attention to the proceedings of his two friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, and relate what success they met with in their desperate enterprise, as well as explain the meaning of the sounds which had from time to time reached Dick Turpin's ears during his extraordinary perambulation of the prison.

The "family" had a ready means of communicating with each other, and in less than an hour from the time when Claude's proposal was agreed to, not a single member of the large fraternity was in ignorance of it.

It would not be going too far to say that there was not one unwilling heart amongst them.

Dick Turpin was an immense favourite with them, and they would gladly render him any service in their power, but, on the present occasion, they were perfectly mad for the hour of action to arrive.

To them it seemed like being free from the trammels of the law if the huge prison-house could be destroyed.

Long before the appointed hour small groups of men collected in the open space in the Old Bailey which faces the prison, and their numbers kept continually augmenting, so that in a very short time a large body of men had congregated together.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had stipulated that the conduction of the whole affair should rest in their hands.

They were to be the commanding officers, so to speak, whose orders were to be promptly and unconditionally obeyed.

Their preparations were soon made.

Their directions were simple.

Just under a gateway that faced the prison, four horses

were to stand in a state of perfect readiness for our friends.

A man was appointed to take charge of each of these horses.

It was in this way that our friends prepared for their retreat.

Then the general instructions to the body of the people were—

To make a dash at the doors leading to the prison—to break them down—overcome all the resistance offered to them, and, proceeding to the cells, open the doors of every one, thus setting all who were prisoners at liberty.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were to be got out of the prison as quickly as possible, mounted on their steeds, and taken away from the spot by Claude and Jack, before pursuit could be commenced.

The mob were then to complete their work of demolishing the building.

These plans were well laid, and well calculated to achieve the end proposed.

The only thing was to get them carried out, and with so fierce and turbulent a body of men this would be no easy task.

However, Claude and Jack felt a great amount of confidence as to the result.

At length the whole of the "family" had assembled, or at all events quite enough of them for the purpose required.

Then the word of command was given.

There was not a man present who was not well armed with such weapons as were likely to be of the most service to them.

As soon as the word of command was given, then, the compact mass made a dash across the Old Bailey, and began battering at the different doors leading to the prison.

These men were armed with large, heavy axes.

The doors of Newgate were strong, but not strong enough to withstand such weapons as those.

Splinters of wood flew about in all directions.

The first door that was forced was that little one at the top of the flight of stone steps which lead into the vestibule.

The turnkeys in this place made no attempt to defend the door, but as soon as they became convinced of the hostile intentions of the mob, made all speed to the governor's apartments, locking all the doors they possibly could in their progress.

Then the other doors were smashed in.

The alarm in the prison of Newgate was now very great and general.

There was quite a rush to the alarm-bell, which was pulled by half a dozen hands.

The clangor was terrific.

The alarm-bell of Newgate was a huge affair, fixed in the roof of the prison.

It was intended to be used as a signal to give notice that a prisoner had escaped, or in the event of any extraordinary occurrence.

The diurnal sounds echoed far and wide over the sleeping city.

The people living nearest to the prison were of course the first to take the alarm, and soon many anxious faces could be seen peering out of the windows, while others ascended to the house-tops.

As soon as the men got fairly inside the prison they lost all recollection of what had been said to them, and at once set to work.

They fired the building in a dozen places.

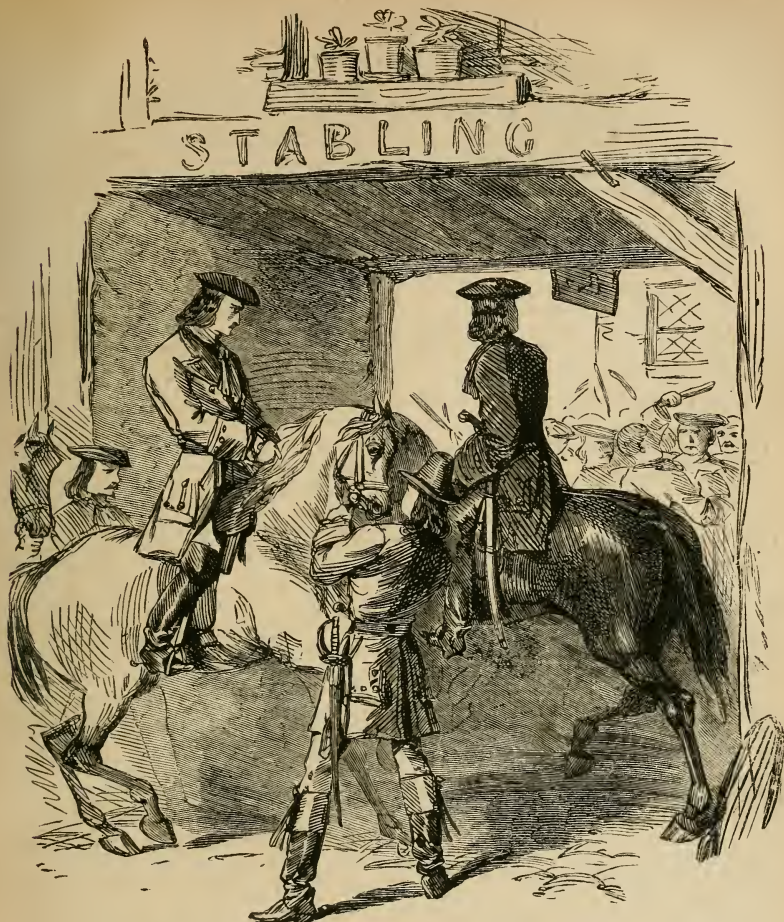
In fact, wherever they saw a chance of setting fire to it they did so.

There was a great deal of wood work about some parts of the building, and the fire, of course, made rapid progress.

Moreover, several of the men had carried in armful of dry twigs, which they were anxious to get rid of, so they threw them down and set fire to them.

It would have been by far more prudent to have released the prisoners first.

In a dense mass however, which there was no resisting, they swept into the passages and burst down all the doors which opposed themselves to them in their onward progress.



[THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN MOUNT THEIR STEEDS BENEATH THE ARCHWAY.]

Foremost in the throng, and making almost superhuman exertions, were Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

To the full were they conscious of the many difficulties that stood in the way of their achieving their aim, and now that they were so much nearer to it they felt a proportionate amount of anxiety.

Indeed, as they then stood beneath the roof of Newgate, for the first time in their lives, they felt far from safe, although their position was so peculiar.

There was something in the very atmosphere of the place which oppressed them.

Brandishing the axes with which they had armed themselves, they dashed forward and furiously attacked every obstacle which opposed itself to their onward progress.

But, above all the din and racket which was made, could be heard the dismal tolling of the alarm-bell of Newgate.

Oh! how our friends wished they could only find the rope which was attached to it.

How quickly would they have severed it,

Unless the din was stopped, the whole of the city would be aroused, and then what a desperate situation would be theirs.

Claude and Jack were well aware of the amount of dependence which could be placed in the mob ostensibly under their control.

They knew how fickle and unstable they were, and how likely to give up the enterprise at the very moment when they might be successful.

Our readers may, therefore, imagine what a load of responsibility was at their hearts.

Already Claude and Jack found a portion of the instructions they had given had been disobeyed.

They could feel the hot breath of fire upon their cheeks.

It was impossible for them to say what sort of progress it would make, or what hold it had taken of the building.

It might spread with great rapidity, as fires sometimes and generally will.

It might seize upon the whole of the edifice in such a

manner as to make it impossible for them to escape with their lives.

Very little good would, however, be done by thinking of this. Other and more important matters called for their attention.

They had only a vague and general idea of the position of the cells, and no definite idea whatever as to the locality of the ones in which their two comrades were confined.

Down went the doors as soon as they came to them, and whenever a flight of steps appeared, having a downward tendency, they descended them immediately.

At length the corridors from which the dungeon doors opened were reached.

The mob had now something to do.

With loud cries, they dashed at the cell doors.

But they were repulsed.

The iron doors were too strong for them.

Then they noticed what they might have seen before, if they had only taken the trouble to look, and that was, that not only were the doors themselves of the strongest possible material, but that they opened outwards, and that the pressure they applied only had the effect of shutting them closer.

Moreover, the fastenings were on the outer side, and it would only be a few minutes' easy work to remove them. When once they had made this discovery, they set about removing the fastenings at once.

The creaking bolts were withdrawn.

The ponderous bars lifted from their staples, and flung on to the floor of the corridor.

There then remained nothing but the locks.

But these were such insignificant obstacles that they thought nothing of them.

They were either wrenched off, or else the boxes provided for the reception of the bolts were knocked to pieces.

Then the prisoners were released.

They immediately joined the throng of their liberators, and set about doing the same service for others.

In those cases where the prisoners were secured with chains they were violently and roughly freed from their fetters.

Some dozen or twenty cells were opened in this manner and their inmates set free, but as yet they had not succeeded in finding either Dick Turpin or Tom King.

Claude and Jack continually occupied themselves with shouting out the names of their missing comrades, but no reply was vouchsafed to them.

They got terribly anxious, for they feared Newgate would soon be too hot to hold them.

They were not only apprehensive of the fire, which was raging with great fury in many parts of the building, but they feared that the alarm would spread rapidly, and that a force might be opposed to them that might be death or madness to resist.

One after the other the whole of the doors in the corridor had been opened, but without the wished-for discovery having been made.

Retracing their steps, however, they proceeded to another corridor.

Claude and Jack were the first to enter it.

They ran down to its farthest extremity, calling out to their comrades in the loudest tones, but without meeting with the wished-for response.

Still more uneasy, and fearful that, after all, they should not accomplish the mission, they left the chief part of the mob to the task of liberating this fresh lot of prisoners while they sought in other directions.

They were followed by a great number of people.

Presently the loud cries of Claude Duval were responded to by a voice, which, though it sounded weak and faint, he immediately recognised.

He cried out in a joyful tone to his comrade, Jack, who hastened to his side.

Claude spoke again, and once more came the reply.

It was from a dungeon on his right hand that the response proceeded.

"Here is Tom," cried Claude, "and it is to be hoped Dick is not far off. Lend me your aid, my friend, and we will try if we cannot quickly release him."

Claude and Jack had taken care before they started upon their enterprise to stow away about their persons a multitude of articles, of which they might possibly want to make some use.

Jack produced a bunch of skeleton keys, and fitted one into the lock, while Claude withdrew the bars and removed the iron bar.

By the time he had done this, Jack had found a key which would fit the lock.

He turned it round, and had the satisfaction of finding that it acted upon the wards at the first trial.

The door was swung open.

A glare of light was projected into the dungeon, and then, heavily ironed in the manner we have described, they saw their companion, Tom King.

Astonishment of the most unbounded character was expressed upon his face.

In the silence and solitude of his darkness he had heard the fearful uproar without, but he was quite at a loss to find a cause to which he could ascribe it.

He knew that something of an unusual character was going on, because he could hear, above all other sounds, the clanging din of the alarm-bell at Newgate.

After waiting in anxious suspense, the sounds of many footsteps in the corridor without came to his ears, and then he heard himself called upon by name.

At first, so overcome was he that, though he made a tremendous effort to speak, he found it was impossible.

His emotions overpowered him.

He could scarcely credit his own ears.

Again and again, however, he heard his name repeated, and by the same friendly and well-known voice.

Then he managed to speak in a low tone at first, but the second time much louder.

In a cheerful voice he heard Claude Duval bid him to wait with patience for a moment, and then he should be free.

There could be no sort of doubt or mistake about the meaning of the words that were uttered, for they were immediately followed by the withdrawal of the fastenings of the door.

Surely, he thought, he must be dreaming.

How on earth could Claude and Jack be in Newgate? and how came it that they showed themselves so indifferent about being heard as they evidently did?

His brain was in a whirl.

Not for a single moment did the least glimmering of the real state of the case dawn upon his mind.

But whatever doubts he might have entertained with respect to the reality of what was taking place, they were dispelled entirely when the door of the cell was thrown open, and his two comrades appeared upon the threshold.

He sprang forward as far as the chain by which he was confined to the floor would allow him.

The greeting between them, although much hurried, was a warm one.

No time was to be spared for much speech or lengthy explanations.

Sixteen-String Jack produced another bunch of skeleton keys, of a much smaller make than the others, and concentrated all his energies upon the task of freeing Tom King from his fetters.

CHAPTER CXXCVIII.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, DETERMINE TO SAVE DICK TURPIN FROM THE BURNING PRISON, OR PERISH WITH HIM.

THIS was far from being an easy matter, for, out of compliment to the prisoner, the irons were secured in a very intricate manner.

But with the assistance of the various instruments with which he was provided, Jack soon rid Tom of these encumbrances, and right glad was our friend to find himself once more with his limbs at liberty.

"Follow us," cried Claude and Jack to him. "We cannot stay to give explanation now. Follow us! we have yet a great deal to do."

"Dick Turpin," cried Tom, whose first thought was for his old and well-tried friend. "Dick Turpin, where is he?"

"We have not found him yet."

"On—on, then!" cried King. "You were right when you said you had much to do. The most important part of your enterprise has yet to be achieved."

"Do you know where his cell is situated?"

"No: I have no better idea than yourselves."

"We have no resource, then, but to adopt the same plan as enabled us to discover you."

"And what was that?"

"To shout at every cell door, and listen for a reply."

"Newgate is a vast place, and that will take a long time."

"It will. More time than we can spare. Can you hear that roaring, crackling sound?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Fire."

"Is the prison on fire?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens, we are lost."

"Nay, calm yourself."

"But I can feel the heat now of the flames upon my face, and the corridor, I see, is full of smoke. How are we to escape with our own lives, let alone rescue Dick Turpin?"

"I have no very serious misgivings respecting the fire—at all events just at present."

"Then you know something of it?"

"Yes. The arrangement was that you and Dick should be liberated, and then the prison set on fire, but they were so impatient that they could not wait until the proper moment, but fired the prison in a dozen places."

"Good heavens! You fill me with alarm. And see what a monstrous flame that was that swept past the ends of the corridor. I fear the fire is of a much more serious character than you imagine."

"And this really was the case."

The old prison was in the interior fitted with wood, and these fittings the fire had caught.

Then the devastating element had spread to the roofs and ceilings until the whole of the building was fairly in flames.

The mob on the outside saw the tremendous progress the fire was making, and shouted out in alarm for the safety of those within, and desired them to come out while there was yet time.

The alarm thus uttered entered the battered-down doors of Newgate.

It spread from corridor to corridor.

It reached the ears of those within, and, as they heard it, they one and all made a simultaneous rush to the different exits.

It reached the ears of the terrified officials, who from the first had fled before the mob, intent only on placing the greatest possible distance between them.

They were now in the upper part of the building.

At length the note of alarm reached the ears of the three highwaymen in the corridor, and it almost maddened them.

Was it possible that, so far from rescuing Dick, they had doomed him to destruction—to a worse death than the law would have awarded him?

The reflection was poignant in the extreme.

With loud wild cries upon their lips, they dashed up and down the corridors.

Every cell had been broken open, but no trace of Dick could they see.

It was, they tried to think, just possible that he had been rescued by some other portion of the mob, and was by this time in safety on the outside waiting for them to make their appearance; but all that they knew of Dick's character and disposition gave the lie to this supposition.

The numbers of those around them rapidly decreased, until at length there remained only their three selves.

But, although abandoned by those who had sworn to aid them, they determined not to follow their example and abandon their comrade.

Yet, where could he be?

They had searched all the cells they could find.

In what other part were they to look?

Distracted, scorched, and half blinded by the smoke, they tore madly up and down the passages, and called upon Dick Turpin until their throats were hoarse, and they could shout no longer.

At length, convinced—and most reluctantly were they driven to the conviction—that he was nowhere in the cells in the corridors on a level with where they stood, they were driven to ascend to a higher level, where it was just possible he might be found.

But when they came to the staircase which led to the

upper part of the prison—or, more strictly, that part which was on a level with the ground, for our friends were now beneath it—they were met with such a blinding, scorching sheet of flame that they were compelled to shrink back before it.

It was the horrible roaring sound it made which dismayed them as much as anything.

They waited a moment, in the hope that the violence of the flames would abate.

But they were disappointed.

It seemed, on the contrary, to be gaining fresh force.

There was but one course open to them.

It was a disagreeable one.

It was to make up their minds to be scorched by dashing swiftly through the blaze.

There was, however, no alternative in the matter, without they chose to remain where they were, and that they considered worse than death itself.

Mounting the steps as high as the raging flames would allow them with comfort, they prepared to make a sudden rush.

Up the few remaining stairs they bounded—how, they scarcely knew.

Through the wall of flame they dashed, and fell breathless and scorched in the corridor beyond.

Springing with all haste to their feet, they hurried along in the direction where the flames were less fierce, and where, in consequence, the heat was least.

The cries of many voices now came to their ears.

They were in advance of them, and in that direction they ran.

The sounds became plainer and plainer as they went on, and, in a few moments more, a gush of cool air met their faces most refreshingly.

Ten more steps brought them to an open door.

It led them into the Old Bailey.

The street they saw was one mass of people, all swaying to and fro in the greatest disorder.

Loud and fierce cries came from their lips.

Their faces were plainly revealed by the ruddy beams of light which came from the blazing building.

The houses which were visible had a crowd of faces at each window, while the roof-tops of others were covered.

There seemed to be something going on in the crowd of a character which excited them to the utmost fury.

They groaned—they hissed—they yelled—and swayed backwards and forwards like the waves of a monster sea.

There was no hope of ever gaining the slightest command over such a turbulent seething mass as that.

This was the reflection that simultaneously crossed the minds of the three highwaymen as they stood in the doorway watching the maniacal throng.

A tremendous roar now came from the throats of the nearest portion of the mob, and Claude and his companions strained their eyes in the endeavour to ascertain what was taking place.

The only thing which caught their eye was a bundle of something which was tossed here and there above the heads of the mob, as a cork might be tossed upon the surface of greatly agitated water.

Backwards and forwards the bundle went—first one way, and then another.

It bore an appearance of elasticity, for it seemed to bound up into the air every time it reached the mob.

But that was not caused in reality by any power possessed by the bundle itself.

It was caused by the people holding up their arms and catching it as it was about to fall.

Then hurling it up in the air as high as their strength permitted.

And all this was accompanied by the most discordant cries and yells and execrations that ever came from the throats of an excited mob.

Our friends were entirely at a loss to account for what they saw.

They could not make it out at all.

This spectacle was one which they were quite unprepared to see.

No words could be distinguished as coming from the lips of the excited throng, or these might have furnished some clue as to the meaning of the proceedings.

As they gazed thus for the space of a few minutes, and saw what we have described, as well as made the reflection

tions which the scene called for, their attention became so absorbed, that they forgot all else.

Perceiving a man close before him to whom he was known, Claude Duval seized hold of him, and by main force dragged him inside the door where his associates stood.

The man made a desperate resistance at first, but upon seeing who it was that held him, he became suddenly still.

"Speak," said Claude Duval, "and tell me at once! What is the meaning of the strange scene going on before us?"

"Strange scene?"

"Yes. What bundle is that the people are throwing about, and what are they throwing it about for?"

"It ain't no bundle."

"What then? And why do they yell in that frightful manner?"

"You ask me two questions at once," said the man, "and I don't know which to reply to; but if you will be quiet a moment, I will tell you all I know."

"Say on, then."

"Among the prisoners who were released from the cells, was a man named Adrian Winberry, whose execution was fixed to take place to-morrow morning."

"Enough, I know him."

"It was through him that Dick Turpin was captured."

"It was."

"Well, then, the mob, when they found who it was they had let out of the cell, determined that he should not escape the fate he so richly merited, but die a more horrible death."

"What death?"

"They carried him out into the street, despite his furious struggles. They denounced him as the murderer of Mr. Winberry, and hurled him at the people's heads. He was caught as he descended, and tossed up again, and so he has been tossed about ever since, and so he will continue to be while there is a breath of life left in him."

"Oh! this is horrible!" exclaimed Claude Duval. "Bad the man may be, but surely he does not deserve so terrible a fate as this."

"You cannot help it. Besides, if you could induce the people to desist, it would be no good. He must be quite dead by this time."

With these words on his lips, which he spoke in the most unconcerned manner possible, the man turned, and would have mingled with the crowd again.

But his progress was arrested by Tom King, who clutched him tightly by the arm.

"You said just now, did you not, that you saw some prisoners liberated from their cells?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, then, can you tell us whether one of the prisoners set free was Dick Turpin, in whose behalf this attack upon Newgate was principally made?"

"No, he was not. I have not seen him, and I am almost—nay, quite—certain that he is not at liberty."

"I feared as much," said Claude Duval. "Now, my friends, what are we to do?"

"Do? we can do but one thing. If Dick Turpin is not free, he must be somewhere within the building, where he will perish unless we find him."

"Forward, then," cried Tom King. "I, for one, will either save or perish with him, and I know both you will be of the same mind as myself. Follow me, and we will search the building from the roof to the foundation but what we will find him."

And, as he spoke these words, quite heedless of the peril of the course he was about to adopt, Tom King dashed back again into the burning building.

He did not turn his head to see whether he was followed by his companions.

That, he knew, would be quite useless.

He was certain they were close behind him.

"Back, then, into the blinding smoke and scorching flame they went, intent upon rescuing their gallant comrade from the fate which threatened him.

From chamber to chamber they went, up staircases and down, through long dreary corridors, all the while shouting for him at the top of their voices.

But Newgate is a large place, and, besides, neither of our friends were acquainted with its intricacies, and,

therefore, they were not likely to be very successful in their search.

In the meantime the fire spread with the most alarming swiftness, and in a little time it became clear that the fire had seized upon the whole of the building.

Maddened by the want of success which had hitherto attended their efforts, the three friends rushed from room to room.

Still to no purpose.

And now the flames increased in force and heat, and more than once they were compelled to retreat before them.

But, gathering courage and fresh strength from each repulse, they persevered and fought their way onwards.

They had, they fancied, been all over the edifice, but they might have been mistaken, for the smoke was confusing, and the stone chambers and the vaulted corridors were bewilderingly alike.

No words of ours could possibly express the dread and anxiety which filled the hearts of the three highwaymen as they found all their efforts unresultful.

Every moment, too, that elapsed threatened them with fresh danger.

When they got outside the building they expected to have many difficulties to contend with.

The mob might be attacked by the military, for there had been time enough for the alarm to spread all over London.

Suddenly they came to a door which they did not remember having seen before.

It was unfastened, and they flung it open in a minute. To their disappointment they found it led into the Old Bailey.

The people were still assembled in a dense mass.

Their countenances were still lighted up by the ruddy light.

Our friends were about to turn away again, when a cry burst from the lips of the mob, which had the effect of instantly arresting their attention.

CHAPTER CCCXLIX.

DICK TURPIN HAS SOME HAIR-BREADTH ESCAPES IN THE BURNING PRISON, AND GIVES MR. CAWTHORN ONE FOR LUCK.

LET us leave Claude Duval and his two comrades for a few moments—they have had lately a full share of attention—and let us relate the further extraordinary adventures of Dick Turpin in the prison of Newgate.

The reader will doubtless recollect that, when we last left him, it was under rather peculiar circumstances.

He was disguised in the exterior articles of apparel which had been worn by the watchman he had left insensible in the paved yard.

The long white coat, the felt hat, the short thick stick, the lantern, and the thick woollen comforter which was wound round his throat made a very efficient disguise indeed, and almost any one, casually glancing at him, would be deceived by it.

It had deceived the watchman in the vestibule, for he had addressed Dick by the name of Wilks, which probably was the name of the man who lay so quietly in the yard.

We have related how Dick succeeded in getting close to this watchman without exciting any suspicion in that individual's breast, and how he had suddenly taken advantage of his proximity to deal the watchman a blow with his stick on his head, which gave forth an ominous sort of crack.

The watchman dropped down on the floor of the vestibule as if he had been shot.

It was just as he had done this that Dick heard a tremendous crash.

What it was, or what it meant he did not really know.

It was the mob, who had just succeeded in breaking down one of the outer doors of the prison.

Then Dick's ears were assailed by the clanging of a bell, which he recognised as being the alarm-bell of Newgate.

Something of an unusual character was now evidently taking place within the prison, and the idea that naturally first presented itself to his mind was that his escape from the cell had been discovered.

He drew in his breath, and clutched the stick firmly in his right hand.

It was the only serviceable weapon he had got.

He then looked around him, determined not to abandon his idea of rescuing his comrade.

He counted no less than seven doors opening from the vestibule.

It was only natural that he should hesitate a moment as to which he should take.

It was while in this state of indecision that he heard the trampling of feet, and then the door which happened to be facing him, was thrown violently open.

A crowd of persons rushed in.

By their attire Dick could tell they were Newgate officials every one of them.

They seemed to be in a state of the greatest panic and consternation.

Nearly all carried lights.

Some were only partially dressed, and among these was one who Dick Turpin recognised instantly.

It was Mr. Cawthorn, the governor of Newgate.

He presented quite a picturesque appearance.

But his countenance was expressive of the utmost alarm.

"What shall we do?" he cried; "what shall we do? We shall be murdered, every one of us, or burnt to death, or something. We can't get out, because of the mob, and the mob won't let any one come near us who would render us assistance. Hullo! what is this?"

He saw the body of the prostrate watchman.

"Here's Wilks," said some one. "What brings Wilks here? He ought to be on the outside of the prison."

"That is not Wilks," cried Mr. Cawthorn, as a ray of light from one of the numerous lanterns fell upon Dick's face. "That isn't Wilks, you idiot. Seize him!"

The men rushed forward in a body to execute this command, but they beat a precipitate retreat directly.

Dick saw his danger, and did the wisest thing he could.

That was to place his back against the wall of the vestibule.

He met the onslaught of his foes with a vigorous flourish of the short thick stick.

He brought it down upon their heads, or any other part of their bodies that came in his way, with right good will, and they fell back bruised and bleeding.

"Confusion!" cried Mr. Cawthorn, as he witnessed the defeat of his men. "Upon him again! That is Dick Turpin in disguise. Seize him! A hundred pounds will be divided among those who succeed in making him a captive!"

These words produced a wonderful effect upon those to whom they were addressed.

Mr. Cawthorn was a man who happened to be gifted with an extraordinary memory of faces.

He only needed to see a man once to tell him ever after. Now with Dick's appearance he was, as the reader may suppose, owing to his long sojourn in the jail, tolerably familiar; and so he was with Wilks, the watchman.

He saw, then, at a glance that it was not Wilks, and another glance enabled him to identify the disguised man as Dick Turpin.

How he came to be there, or how he had succeeded in disguising himself in Wilks' apparel, he did not know.

Finding himself known, however, and certain that the cumbersome clothing he had put on would no longer be of any assistance to him, Dick Turpin pulled off the watchman's hat and comforter, and then divested himself of his coat.

He stood there then in his own proper character, and ready to do battle with his foes.

They numbered twenty to his one.

But the mode of action he adopted rather astonished them and took them aback.

Instead of waiting for the attack, which they were preparing to make, and which, doubtless, would have been a successful one so far as his capture was concerned, Dick uttered a loud yell, enough of itself to strike terror into the boldest heart; then, whirling the watchman's stick round his head, he dashed forward, and vigorously attacked his foes.

This was a manoeuvre which they never for a moment expected, and they were in consequence for a moment too much surprised to do anything in the shape of warding off the attack.

It thus happened that during this movement Dick Turpin was able to do a great deal of execution.

His enemies seemed to fall before him like grass before the scythe.

Right and left they gave way before him.

Then Dick made a leap which carried him a good four feet towards the door through which Mr. Cawthorn had entered.

Mr. Cawthorn himself was standing close to it, and Dick thought this a capital opportunity of paying off old scores.

The governor of Newgate could tell perhaps by the expression of Turpin's face what he was about to do, and he darted aside.

But he was not quick enough to evade the blow which Dick aimed at him.

Crack! came the end of the watchman's stick on to the top of the governor's head, and then in an instant he measured his full length upon the floor.

Without stopping to see how far the blow had been effectual, Dick darted through the door close to which he was, and slammed it behind him.

Hastily turning round, he felt for the fastenings.

He found a couple of bolts.

It did not take him a second to shoot them into their sockets.

He was only just in time.

With a tremendous rush, the men dashed against the door, no doubt under the expectation that it would immediately give way, but they were deceived.

It remained as firm as a rock.

Dick turned round, and found himself in a low, arched passage, which seemed to extend in a straight line for a considerable distance.

There were no doors opening from it, so he was forced to run along it, no other course being open to him.

At the extremity of this passage there was a flight of steps, which led upwards, and the top of which he could not see.

This was not what Dick wanted.

He was quite low enough down in the prison to be where the cells were situated, and, if he went any higher, he would get out of the way of them altogether.

There was no choice left for him, though.

He must either ascend those steps, or go back to his foes.

The latter alternative was so out of the question as not to amount to any choice at all.

Up the stairs he went, then, taking two at a time, in order to get to the top as quickly as possible.

Upon reaching it, however, the unmistakable odour of fire came to his nostrils.

In the distance, too, he could see dense volumes of smoke.

By listening he could hear the roaring and crackling of the flames.

He then recollected what the governor had said about the prison being attacked by a mob and set on fire, and then the conviction came over him that all this was to be attributed to his friends, who were, doubtless, taking this means of rescuing him.

This was to him, under the circumstances in which he was placed, a very consoling thought.

Perhaps they had already succeeded in freeing Tom King from his cell.

But Dick did not like to trust to this supposition without having some better proof than he had at present.

On arriving at the top of the stairs, he found himself on a little square landing, from which only one door opened. The steps commenced again in a corner, and still led upwards.

Disregarding them, Dick turned all his attention to the door.

It was fast, but, exerting all his strength, he burst it open.

No sooner had he done so, however, than such a mass of flame rushed forth, that he was compelled to either draw back or sacrifice his life.

What was on the other side of the door, or where it led, Dick was, of course, unable to form any idea.

Rapidly he retreated, for the flames, having found an outlet, rushed forth with great fury.

Dick was still compelled to ascend.

He ran to the corner where the stairs commenced, pur-

sued by a long tongue of flame, which seemed intent upon reaching him.

But Dick gained the race, and was quickly out of the way of that danger.

There was no comfort. The fire would form a tolerably good barrier between himself and his foes, and they would not be able to pursue him with such readiness as they otherwise might.

Up the staircase, then, he sprang, determined to go no higher than he was obliged.

The staircase was a spiral one.

Coming, at length, to a kind of landing, he saw a door, which he pushed open.

There was a great deal of smoke beyond, but Dick did not hesitate to pass through the door, and close it after him.

He found himself in an apartment, which was comfortably furnished as a bed-chamber.

There were many little valuable articles lying about, and the materials of which every object was composed were of excellent quality.

Indeed, although Dick Turpin only took a hasty glance around him, he was rather surprised to find such a looking place inside Newgate.

The thought did not at first strike him that he had made his way into that part of the prison occupied by the governor, but such was the fact.

This will account for his friends having searched so unsuccessfully for him among the cells.

Dick did not stop to make any examination of this room.

There was an uncomfortable feeling of heat in it, and the smoke was rapidly increasing in volume and density.

The thing which took Dick's attention was the door, and he hastily opened it.

He saw another room beyond.

Uttering an exclamation of impatience, Dick crossed it.

The fire was beginning to give him very great uneasiness.

He was fearful that Tom would perish in the burning mass.

It was some means of getting lower down that he wanted to find. He knew that while he remained where he was, or went up higher, he should only be wasting time.

A feeling of great satisfaction, then, came over his heart when, on crossing this room and passing through the door of it, he found himself upon a spacious staircase, which went both up and down.

He chose the latter direction, and went down at what might, with great propriety, be called a breakneck speed.

As he went down, however, he found the heat increase in an astonishing degree.

The smoke, too, became thick and blinding.

Plainly could he hear the roaring sound which flame produces—a sound which, once heard, can never be forgotten.

Still he kept on, determined, if possible, not to allow himself to be turned back.

He felt his face scorch, and his hair singe, while his clothing seemed ready to burst into flame at a dozen places.

Then he paused, and abandoned the idea of descending any further, for to look down was like looking into a furnace.

Under this impulse, Dick stepped back a few paces, and well was it for him he did so.

If he had remained any longer than he did upon the spot he had just occupied, he would have assuredly perished.

With a tremendous crash a large piece of the staircase, which, by the action of the fire, had been rendered unable to sustain its own weight, gave way, and fell into the blazing depths below.

It had the effect for a moment of subduing the raging of the flames.

But they soon broke forth again with redoubled fury, as though from the restraint that had been put upon them.

Turpin shuddered when he thought of the narrow escape he had had.

It was certain that he would have to find some other means of descending than that

He looked around him.

He was standing on a landing from which several doors opened.

Selecting one of these at random, he found it gave way before the pressure he applied to it.

Crossing the threshold, he entered another bed-chamber.

The floor beneath his feet felt burning hot.

Looking down, he could see between the crevices of the boarding long bright lines of light.

For the first time the idea crossed his mind that he was in a situation of extreme peril, and that he might have the greatest difficulty in saving his own life.

Convinced that he should do no good to his friend by lingering in the fire, he advanced towards the window, with the intention of making his way out of it before the fire in the room beneath made such a thing impossible.

CHAPTER CCCL.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN MAKING A PERILOUS EXIT FROM NEWGATE, AND IN JOINING HIS FRIENDS IN THE STREET BELOW, WHERE HE FINDS HIMSELF BESET WITH FRESH DIFFICULTIES.

No sooner did Dick Turpin make his appearance at the window, than he was greeted by a loud shout, which seemed to come from a hundred thousand throats.

It was not, however, a yell which greeted him, but a cry of satisfaction and pleasure.

There was no mistaking the character of it.

Looking down, Dick saw that the window at which he stood was a considerable distance from the ground, and that beneath him was the Old Bailey.

He knew the street instantly.

It was brilliantly illuminated by the flames which rose from the blazing building.

Opposite he could see the well-known and familiar shop kept by Coles, the pie-maker.

The Old Bailey was filled with people.

Never in all his life had Dick Turpin beheld such a vast assemblage.

Once afterwards he saw a waster.

He could tell those beneath him were his friends, and he waved his hands repeatedly to them.

Each time that he did so they gave vent to a tremendous cheer, which made all the place echo again.

Dick Turpin looked down as he meditated making his descent.

There was a window immediately below the one at which he stood.

Through this the flames and smoke poured in volumes.

Through this, too, he would have to pass, before he could reach the ground.

While he stood for this short time in doubt, the fire broke through the flooring from the room below, while smoke surrounded it.

The people noticed it and gave a loud cry, which warned Dick of his danger.

There was clearly no resource for him but to leave Newgate, and that at once.

If he remained he would surely perish.

He must give up all hopes of rescuing his comrade, and console himself with the reflection that some one had been beforehand with him.

The reader will remember that at the close of a previous chapter we stated that Claude Duval, Sixteen-String Jack, and Tom King were about to turn back into the prison, and renew their search for Dick, when their footsteps were arrested by a cry which came from the throats of the people outside.

It was the cry which greeted Dick Turpin's appearance at the window.

Something of an extraordinary nature had happened they felt certain, and it was very necessary for them to know what it was.

They made their way therefore into the crowd.

The first thing they noticed was that the people all turned their faces in one direction.

They followed them, and then they saw the person for whom they had been so anxiously searching, standing at one of the front windows of the prison.

But he seemed to be literally surrounded by flame and smoke.

No sooner did they see this, than the three highway-

men at once gave up the idea of making their way into the interior of the prison.

They pushed through the crowd so as to get as close to the windows as they could.

But they would never have got through the compact mass in the way they did, if it had not been for the circumstance of their being recognised.

They were known as being the intimate friends of Dick Turpin, whose position looked so perilous, and they would doubtless do all in their power to rescue him.

In holding this opinion the mob were perfectly correct. A lane was opened just wide enough for the highwaymen to get through, and as soon as they passed it was closed up after them.

In a comparatively short space of time, then, they managed to get just beneath the window at which Turpin stood.

Then they shouted and waved their hats, in the endeavour to attract his attention.

In this they were also successful.

Down through the mass of smoke Dick looked, as the well-remembered tones struck upon his ears, and then a friendly gust of wind blew the smoke away, and he saw his old comrades making encouraging signs to him.

"Descend—descend!" they cried to him, at the top of their voices. "Descend! Get something and let yourself down as low as you can. We will be beneath and catch you."

Dick nodded, and then his comrades knew he comprehended what was said to him.

As he looked down through the smoke the first person Dick saw was Tom King.

He was quite overjoyed to see his old companion at liberty. So much so that, with a light heart, and unconcerned manner, he set about freeing himself from his perilous situation.

Tom was free.

The object for which he had risked so much was gained.

He had now nothing to do but to drop into the friendly arms that would be extended to catch him.

Turning round, then, Dick strove to look across the apartment, and see whether there was anything that looked likely to aid him in his descent.

But so filled was the chamber with a dense, blue, suffocating smoke, that he found to look across it was a matter of impossibility.

Then Dick recollected having noticed that the apartment was fitted up with great elegance and taste as a bed-chamber.

He remembered the exact position of the bed itself, and also that it was furnished with white hangings.

If he could reach this bed, then, and obtain possession of a couple of long curtains which hung at the head of it, he would be furnished with a rope that would go a long way towards aiding his descent to the street.

No sooner did this recollection occur to him than he abruptly left the window, and, in spite of the bewildering smoke, made his way towards the bed.

He heard the people give a shout as he disappeared from their view.

The floor cracked beneath Dick's footsteps.

It was all but burnt through, and he was fearful that, after all, it might give way, and precipitate him into the furnace that was raging underneath.

Moving, then, as quickly as possible, so as not to leave his weight in one place any longer than he could help, he made his way to the bed.

Dimly before him he could see the white hangings.

He clutched the one nearest to him, and gave it a sudden snatch; using so much force that the rings, or whatever the fastenings were at the top, gave way, and the curtain came down in his hands.

Leaning over the bed, he caught hold of the one which hung on the opposite side, and, by a similar snatch, brought that down also.

This done, he made his way back with all speed to the window.

His appearance was greeted with a vociferous cheer.

Quickly tying the two long curtains together, Dick proceeded to fasten one end to the window-sash.

He then found he had a rope of about twelve feet in length, and though this was by no means long enough to reach the ground, still, if he descended by it, it would materially break the force of his fall.

The more expeditions he was in his movements now, the better it would be; so, having assured himself that the knot was firmly tied, he proceeded without delay to lower himself through the window.

He projected his feet first, keeping hold of the curtains as he did so.

It was quite time he left the chamber.

Indeed, it is questionable whether he could have remained in it above another moment, for the flames now burst forth through the casement with the utmost fury.

Dick felt the hot blaze scorch his back.

Without losing his presence of mind for a single instant, however, Turpin steadily descended the rope.

With great anxiety his friends stood below in readiness to receive him.

Dick allowed the rope to slip through his fingers until the end was reached, and then he paused.

He was at least fifteen feet from the ground, and that seemed a long way to fall.

Part of the distance, too, was through a mass of flame, the ascending heat of which almost roasted him when he hung.

But through this, when he let go, he would pass with great rapidity, so the probability is that he would receive only slight injuries.

The immense crowd of human beings that filled the street were now intensely silent.

Not a sound came from any one of them.

Their interest was wholly concentrated upon the scene that was taking place before them.

The only sound that rose above the roaring of the flames and the tolling of the alarm bell, was the voices of Dick's friends encouraging him to let go.

Dick obeyed.

He relaxed his hold of the rope, and closing his eyes, allowed himself to fall.

There was a sudden sensation of heat.

A still more sudden shock.

Then he was safe and surrounded by friends.

A thousand hands were now outstretched to grasp his in a friendly pressure.

As well as they could, his three friends kept off the pressure of the mob.

They had now only one object to achieve, and that was to get away as quickly as they were able.

But this was destined to be a very difficult matter.

The crowd was quite solid, and it seemed as impossible to force a way through it as to force a way through the strong stone walls of Newgate.

Claude Duval had laid his plans well, but this was a little obstacle which he had not foreseen.

Under an archway, on the opposite side of the Old Bailey, and just facing the principal entrance to the prison, were four horses of first rate quality.

They were in the charge of men upon whom the utmost reliance could be placed.

This archway, then, under which the horses were kept waiting—saddled, bridled, and ready for instant service—led into a kind of inn-yard.

On the left-hand side of this yard there was another gateway, similar in all respects to the other.

But this led from the yard into Fleet-lane—a very narrow and disreputable thoroughfare, which is now partially in existence.

From this description the reader will be easily able to obtain an insight into Claude's plan.

He calculated that they would be able to reach the archway and mount the horses there.

Then, when they had done this, the cattle were to be walked down the yard, and out of the other archway into Fleet-lane.

This thoroughfare would be sure to be deserted.

For the convenience of those who may not be acquainted with the locality, we may as well state that Fleet-lane is a narrow street which runs at right angles out of the Old Bailey, and connects that thoroughfare with Farringdon-street.

But, at the time of which we are writing, Farringdon-street was not in existence. The space now known by that name was then designated Fleet-market.

It was down this Fleet-lane, then, that Claude thought they would be able to make their way without having to encounter any obstacles.

And, doubtless, his calculations would have proved to be quite correct.

But there was the difficulty of getting to the archway.

It was in vain they strove to force a way through the mob.

Every individual of whom it was composed seemed intent upon grasping Dick Turpin by the hand.

It might be very satisfactory to know that one possessed so many friends, but just then their demonstrations of amity were rather undesirable.

Suddenly, however, there was a loud cry, and signs were given that something of an unusual character was going on upon the outskirts of the mob.

This caused a favourable diversion.

And here let us take an opportunity to pause a moment.

We have been altogether led away from describing the effects of the actions, and have simply described the actions themselves.

In the first place, then, there was the prison of Newgate.

From having been set on fire in so many places, the flames had spread with great swiftness over the whole edifice.

A great portion of it, being built of stone as it was, would, doubtless, for a long time withstand the action of the fire, but there was fuel within which would burn for a long time.

Indeed, it soon became evident that nothing but the shell of the building would be left.

The alarm-bell had ceased to toll.

The inmates of the prison, we mean the official inmates of it, finding the desperate aspect which affairs presented, had made their way to the roofs, and from these had succeeded in gaining the roofs of the adjoining habitations.

In these days, when there are so many means of quenching a fire, and so much promptitude in making use of them, some effectual step would long since have been taken; but the case was entirely different a hundred and fifty years ago.

The alarm, of course, spread—it could not fail to do so.

Indeed, the intelligence had been diffused nearly all over London.

Numbers of police-officers arrived, but they were in such a decided minority, when compared with the crowd that filled the space in front of the prison, that they were powerless to do anything but remain passive spectators of the scene.

They could make no impression on such a superior force.

And so the mob had things all its own way.

They remained wedged tightly together, and refused to budge an inch.

While they did this, the officers could do nothing but watch the progress of the flames.

The utmost consternation and excitement prevailed in the immediate vicinity of the prison.

All the people who dwelt there were in the greatest possible fright.

Having stated these facts, the reader will bear no loss to understand how it was the mob was allowed to pursue its course unmolested, and how it was that the highwaymen remained in the prison so long as they did.

The cry, however, of which we have just spoken, showed that something peculiar was taking place.

The crowd began to lose its stability.

The reason was simply this.

The police, finding how utterly useless they were, had despatched some of their number to the nearest barracks, in order to call in the aid of the military to quell the disturbance.

This was done, and the cry announced the arrival of a large troop of mounted dragoons, who were all well armed.

The mob shrank back a little at the sight of such formidable antagonists as these looked to be, and the soldiers, perceiving this slight advantage, hastened to follow it up.

The mob still began to give way, though very slowly. Still they did give way, and were only prevented from giving way still further by their inability to do so.

From mouth to mouth the intelligence passed that they

were attacked by a regiment of dragoons, and at last the tidings reached the ears of the four highwaymen, whose chances of reaching their horses under the archway now seemed to be very much diminished.

CHAPTER CCCLI.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MOUNT THEIR HORSES UNDER THE GATEWAY, AND ARE PURSUED BY THE POLICE.

FROM what has just been said, it will be seen that the aspect of affairs was rather peculiar.

The four highwaymen were now menaced by a danger they had never counted upon.

It was danger from those who had been so friendly to them.

A kind of panic seemed to seize upon the mob when they found they were opposed to a military force, of which they had a very reasonable and natural dread.

Besides, they considered they had accomplished all that they had set out with the intention of doing.

Newgate was nothing but a mass of blazing ruins.

Dick Turpin and Tom King were at liberty.

The other prisoners had been released.

Vengeance had been wreaked upon Adrian Winberry.

What occasion, then, was there to oppose themselves to the dragoons, and be finally dispersed after receiving many wounds, when they might as well quietly disperse, and escape the consequences of what had been done?

Looking at things from this point of view, the conduct of the mob was nothing but rational and consistent.

Quietly, then, they began to disperse along the different streets.

In this movement, however, the highwaymen did not wish to participate.

They wanted to get to the opposite side of the way, but it was like thinking of crossing a torrent.

To remain where they were would be but to court destruction.

In what way were they to act?

Dick suggested that they should mingle in the stream, taking care not to lose sight of each other, and, while going in the same direction as the mob, to endeavour to cross it in a diagonal manner.

This was a course that would have answered very well with a real current of water, and might answer with this current of people.

At any rate, as this was the only feasible plan that could be thought of, it was adopted.

The regiment of dragoons had approached the Old Bailey from the Ludgate-hill end, and, of course, the people drifted towards Newgate-street and Snow-hill.

In this direction our friends went.

They found it easy enough to follow the tide, but not very easy to carry into effect the second part of Dick's suggestion.

Slowly, however, but surely, they increased the distance which intervened between them and the stone walls of Newgate, until, at length, they had got fairly into the middle of the road.

To be brief, they succeeded, after awhile, in crossing the street, and standing in safety, all four together, on the opposite pavement.

It was nearly at the top of the street, however—close to the corner of Skinner-street, in fact—and they had now to work their way back to the archway.

This was at least a hundred and fifty yards distant from where they stood.

They would have to force their way, too, in a direction contrary to that which was taken by the mob.

This they were able to do by going in single file, and keeping very close to the houses.

When the pressure was greater than usual, they were able to withstand it by clinging to such projections as they met with.

In this way they forced a passage, and got on much more quickly than any one would have thought.

To their great satisfaction, however, Dick Turpin and Tom King at length heard Claude and Jack say—

“All right—here we are at last. Turn down the arch.”

Another moment and all four of the highwaymen stood beneath the gateway of which we have spoken.

The red reflection of the fire illuminated this place, and



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN SALUTING DICK TURPIN AS CAPTAIN.]

they were easily able to see the horses and the men who were there in charge of them.

A great load was now removed from the breasts of our friends, and they thought themselves completely out of danger, but in this they were slightly in error, as succeeding events will quickly show.

A word had been agreed upon, the pronunciation of which should be a signal to the man who held the horses that the right persons had called for them.

With all speed possible they mounted their steeds.

By the time they had fairly seated themselves in the saddle, and were in readiness to move, the first part of the soldiers had reached the end of the archway, and were fighting desperately with the mob.

More than this the four highwaymen did not wait to see.

Giving their horses the impulse forward, they made their way into the yard to which the gateway led, and from thence to the other gate, which, as we have already said, would enable them to gain Fleet-lane.

As Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack had arranged between themselves what was to be done, Dick Turpin and Tom King held back and allowed them to take the lead.

The gates were closed, but the man who had been left in charge of the horses ran on in advance and opened them.

There was now nothing to obstruct them.

Passing under the archway they emerged into the narrow lane.

No sooner had they done so, than they heard a voice, which came from the direction of the Old Bailey, say in loud tones—

"There they are—there they are! Hurrah! Forward, my lads! We shall have them, and a good night's work it will be for us! There is two thousand five hundred pounds to be divided between us if we can succeed in capturing them! Forward—forward!"

Instinctively the four highwaymen looked in the direction from which this sound proceeded, and there they saw

what seemed to be a very large body of mounted police-officers.

They were in strong enough numbers to completely block up the thoroughfare.

Of course our friends did not wait to do more than fling one hasty glance at their adversaries.

Having done this, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of Fleet-market, and, just grazing their flanks with their spurs, darted off at full speed.

The officers raised a loud shout, and set off after them at the best speed their horses were capable of making.

The rate at which the four highwaymen tore down Fleet-lane was rather alarming.

Several people were in the street, but they hastened to ensconce themselves in the doorways that were nearest to them.

With a rush the Highwaymen turned the corner into Fleet-market.

This place was crowded with stalls, barrows, baskets, and such litter as may now be seen around Covent Garden-market early in the morning.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were still in advance, and, without saying a word, they turned to the right, taking their course up Fleet-market towards Snow-hill.

At the period of which we are writing, and long afterwards, a kind of open sewer, called the Fleet Ditch, flowed through this place.

The Stygian stream was spanned by a rude wooden bridge.

Over this the highwaymen clattered at unabated speed, but the officers, who valued their necks a little more, slackened speed slightly as they crossed it.

Up Snow-hill—across Smithfield—our friends went with the police-officers at their heels.

Shots were fired every now and then, but they were harmless.

It is a difficult matter to take aim at anything on horse-back while going at full speed.

Continually the officers shouted out to the highwaymen to surrender.

But, as a matter of course, they paid not the slightest attention to them.

The officers were mounted upon horses of excellent quality, and were almost equal to those our friends bestrode.

Such a race as this was, then, could not fail to be full of interest.

As they looked back, and saw how close the troop of officers kept behind them, the four highwaymen became uneasy.

The issue of the race seemed doubtful.

It was in vain they applied, with all possible vigour, both whip and spur to their animals. They were going at the utmost speed, and could not exceed it.

The officers goaded their horses cruelly.

A little horseflesh did not matter much to them; the reward was all they looked for.

Claude led the way towards Islington, then a little village some distance from the metropolis, and not, as it is now, a portion of the huge wilderness of bricks and mortar.

They were in the open country.

London was already far behind, and on both sides of them was nothing but meadows, bordered by tall hedges-rows.

They now reached the foot of a long, steep hill.

The horses showed the most unequivocal signs of exhaustion, and it was pretty certain that, if they were galloped up the hill, they would not be good for much by the time they reached the top.

However, they spurred them onwards, and got half-way up the hill.

Then Dick Turpin, seeing how matters stood, and that it would be something like madness to keep up such a race, cried out "Halt!" at the top of his voice, and, at the same moment, brought his own horse to a stand-still.

His friends were somewhat surprised, and wondered what could be the matter.

But, for all that, they obeyed his command, and came to a full stop.

Dick Turpin turned round and faced the officers.

His comrades did the same.

The officers, who were about twenty in number, were about a quarter of the way up the hill.

Upon seeing their prey stop and turn round in the manner we have described, they were filled with astonishment, and, under the impulse of that feeling, reined in their horses also.

A curious spectacle now presented itself.

The pursuers and the pursued sat regarding each other in silence.

They were just out of the range of pistol-shot.

While the officers continued for a short space of time in this condition of astonishment and indecision, Dick Turpin spoke rapidly to his comrades, thus anticipating the questions which he knew would be asked him.

"It is no good keeping on like this," he said. "We don't stand the ghost of a chance of getting away from them. They will keep on our track like bloodhounds, and follow us everywhere. We had no start, and it is impossible to gain one."

"But what are we to do? We cannot engage with a force so much our superior in point of numbers."

"I have thought of a plan. You see the state of indecision they are in. Already they know not what to think of our sudden movement. From our advantageous position let us charge down upon them. Rely upon it, they will give way before us like chaff before the wind."

This was a bold and daring proposition, and just such a one as we could conceive Dick Turpin to make.

His comrades were surprised at it for a moment, but they soon saw its advantage, and determined that Dick's plan of operations should be followed.

They felt sure the officers would be completely taken by surprise.

Moreover, owing to their advantageous position, they would be able to sweep down upon their foes with a velocity which there would be hardly any resisting.

In the meantime, however, the officers appeared to have recovered from the panic into which they had been thrown, for one of their number, who probably was the one in command, rode forward a few paces with a pistol in his hand.

"It's no go," he cried, at the top of his voice. "You had better give in handsomely, for we mean to have you anyhow. You can't escape, so surrender at once, and I will give you my word you shall not be subjected to any ill-treatment. Come, now, that's a fair offer, seeing as how you're as good as captured already."

"We are of a different opinion," cried Dick, "and we will try to bring you to think the same as we do. Forward, my friends! Down upon them! Hurrah!"

The loud hurrah which Turpin gave was well echoed by his companions, and then, plunging their spurs deep into their horses' flanks, they set off at a fearful gallop down the hill.

The officers saw this movement on the part of the highwaymen with the utmost surprise and consternation.

They made an irresolute sort of stand for a moment, and then, finding how the highwaymen came thundering on, they one and all, as if animated by the same impulse, turned round, and galloped down the hill.

They fully bore out what Dick had said; namely, that they would scatter like chaff before the wind.

The holsters of all the saddles were furnished with pistols, so the highwaymen took the reins between their teeth, and grasped a pistol in each hand.

These they fired, and it was wonderful to see what an impetus the discharge gave to the movements of the officers.

Their speed was much increased.

It was by no means part of Dick's intention to pursue the officers back to London.

As soon as they could after reaching the bottom of the hill, they reined in their horses, and then turned round.

Back up the hill they went, urging their horses to make all the speed they could, because a little distance then in the shape of a start would make a great difference to them.

It would almost seem as though the report of the pistols had had the effect of exciting or frightening their horses, for they tore along at a rapid rate, and seemed oblivious of their fatigue.

Upon reaching the top of the hill, however, our friends paused, and allowed them a short breathing time; but while they did so, they took care to keep a sharp look-out

down the hill, so as to be aware when their foes made their appearance.

It was here, then, that the four friends had the first opportunity of exchanging a few words with each other.

The greeting between them was of the warmest and most cordial description.

There was not, however, much time for the interchange of courtesies.

Important matters pressed upon them, requiring speedy consideration.

In the first place, Dick wanted to know the arrangements which had been made by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

Upon inquiring, however, he found that these arrangements had not extended any further than bringing them to the spot where they now stood.

The expedience of getting to some place of cover was now very palpable.

The officers were not in sight, though, doubtless, not many minutes would elapse before they made their appearance.

Now was the chance of getting shelter somewhere, and such a chance might not occur again.

It would be too much to expect that the same luck would answer a second time, though so successful on the first occasion.

All four, therefore, set their wits to work to hit upon some scheme which would enable them to outwit the officers.

"There is one plan," said Turpin, speaking very slowly, "which I have put into operation a great many times, and never without succeeding; and why should not the same plan answer now?"

"What is it?" asked his comrades eagerly.

"It is to get into the meadows unperceived, and lie down behind the hedge, thus allowing the officers to pass by."

"A good suggestion," cried Claude Duval, "and a thought has just struck me which will, I fancy, enable us to put this ruse successfully into execution."

CHAPTER CCLII.

BY ACTING UPON CLAUDE DUVAL'S SUGGESTION THE HIGHWAYMEN SUCCEEDED IN DOUBLING UPON THE POLICE-OFFICERS.

"THAT is good news, Claude," cried Dick Turpin; "let us hear what you have to propose."

"Oh! it is very simple, but it is not less likely to be successful on that account."

"Certainly not."

"Let us break through the hedge, or get through in some manner that will not leave any trace of where we have gone, and then, instead of lying down behind the hedge, let us creep gently down the hill again."

"I understand you."

"Stop a moment. By dismounting and holding the horses by the bridles we shall be able to lead them down under cover of the hedgerow. There will then be less danger of our being seen."

"But how about the officers?"

"When we hear them approaching we must remain profoundly still. There will be or ought to be nothing to cause them to stop, but will continue their course up the hill, under the impression that we are descending it on the other side."

"A capital plan."

"I am glad you think so, but I have not told you all yet."

"What else is there?"

"If you decide upon acting as I recommend, dismount, for there is no time to lose, and I will tell you in the meanwhile."

"Agreed."

The four highwaymen having resolved upon the adoption of the course proposed by Claude, dismounted from their horses, and proceeded without further delay to look for some gap or opening in the hedge through which they could make their way without leaving anything to show which direction they had taken.

Claude continued.

"As soon as the officers have passed us—as I have no doubt they will—and as soon as we feel sure they have got far enough to be out of ear-shot, we will continue our

progress down the hill until we reach its base. We shall then be able to take one of the numerous cross-roads that will be spread before us."

"Better and better, Claude. Really, that is a capital expedient, and I have no doubt in my own mind that the officers will be completely deceived by it."

"You must make haste," said Sixteen-String Jack. "If you do not, you will be too late, for I can hear the hoof-beats of the officers' horses."

The sound to which Jack had alluded came quite plainly to the ears of his comrades, and it acted as an incentive to them to make all the speed they were able.

As is very often the case in England, the road was bounded on both sides by a bank several feet in height, and on the top of this a hedge was planted so thickly as to be impervious to anything.

Our friends went on in the hope of finding a gap through which they could scramble, but nothing of the kind presented itself to their view.

The hedge was in too good a state of preservation.

At length, however, and just as they were beginning to despair, they came to a gate.

But it was locked.

Such a thing as that was not likely to interfere much with the progress of the highwaymen.

Sixteen-String Jack had it unfastened in a moment.

He held the gate open and allowed them to pass through.

Then, closing it, he restored it to its original position.

The trampling of horses' hoofs could still be heard, though the sound was so faint that any less practised ears than theirs would have failed to detect it.

The officers were, however, at a considerable distance, and some time must elapse before they could reach the top of the hill.

There was consequently an opportunity for our friends to make good speed.

There was no fear of their being heard, for the meadow was covered to a depth of several inches with long grass.

Upon this the horses' feet raised no sound.

The summit of the hill was soon reached, and then the descent was commenced.

Presently they could hear the officers were very close at hand, so they slackened their pace to a walk, and finally became still altogether.

They had no fear of being seen from the road; the bank, and the hedgerow above it, effectually secured them from all possibility of detection.

There was only one thing that was in the least difficult.

That was to keep the horses perfectly still, so that no sudden movement should betray their presence to their enemies.

By patting the creatures, and otherwise caressing them, they were in hopes of doing this.

The officers came on at a gallop.

They were talking very loudly to each other, but the highwaymen could not detect the words they used.

They swept past in a moment.

Our friends drew a long breath, but did not venture to move for several minutes.

At length, when they considered all danger was past, they continued their course down the hill.

The bottom was reached in perfect safety.

Breaking through the hedge, they emerged into the high-road.

The officers were now before them.

The pursuers and the pursued had changed positions. But they did not care about continuing this.

Mounting their steeds, they kept on along the road, looking carefully about them for a cross-road.

They had not far to go before they found one, and they plunged down it without hesitation.

It was a matter of the most perfect indifference to them where it led.

As there was no pressing need for speed, they judged it unadvisable to distress their cattle unnecessarily.

At a gentle trot, then, they took their way along the umbrageous lane.

From time to time they stopped and listened, but they could hear nothing of their pursuers, and they now began to indulge in the hope that they had outwitted them altogether.

With this feeling of partial security in their minds, the

four friends talked over the various occurrences of the past.

They had much to speak about, but there is no necessity for us to do more than allude to it, because the occurrences of the past have been chronicled at length.

Over and over again did they congratulate each other on having made such a fortunate escape.

They now saw in the sky indications of the coming day.

A faint gray tint was overspreading the sky, and the sun was about to rise upon that day which so many people confidently anticipated would be the last that Tom King would pass upon earth.

It was his second narrow escape.

He had need be careful of the third time.

He was, however, light-hearted enough now, and laughed and chatted gaily with his comrades.

The danger was past, and no longer thought of or heeded.

That they were all greatly fatigued after what they had gone through, our readers can easily believe; and, now that the day was advancing, they looked rather anxiously about them, in order to find some place of shelter.

It might be, however, that they would have to travel a considerable distance before they came to a house, for they had got quite far enough from London for houses to be things of very rare occurrence.

A substantial meal and an hour's rest at some roadside inn would be a good thing both for their horses and themselves.

In the desire to reach an inn as quickly as possible, they put spurs to their steeds and increased their speed.

Presently the end of the cross-country road was reached, and here, as they had more than half expected, they found a public-house.

The junction of a cross-road with the main highway was the place generally chosen for their erection.

Although the hour was such an early one, the inmates of the public-house were all astir.

The sounds of their horses' feet brought the landlady and the ostler to the door.

It was Dick Turpin who inquired whether they could take the horses into bait for an hour or two, and find them with a meal.

He was answered in the affirmative.

Accordingly they dismounted, and, having seen their steeds disposed of in the stable and properly attended to, they returned to the house.

Upon entering the huge, comfortable kitchen they found that a substantial repast had been laid for them, and they sat down to it with hearty good will.

Their exertions and the keen morning air had made them as hungry as hunters.

They washed their food down with copious draughts of some of the finest October ale they had ever tasted.

They remained at the inn nearly two hours, at the end of which time the day had fairly begun.

However, they had their horses saddled and brought to the front of the inn; then, mounting them, they turned their heads in the direction of the country.

When they left the inn they had to ascend a hill—being, in fact, another portion of the one they had ascended a short time before.

Upon reaching the top the four highwaymen paused to look about them.

The scene that was spread before them was truly magnificent.

The day was an unusually clear one, and the ground, being rather flat, they were able to see round them in a circle that was very many miles in diameter.

Not a word had been said about pausing at the top of the hill, nor was the reason for doing so mentioned, but all did so, and all, shading the extraneous rays of light from their eyes with their hands, took a long and earnest look around them.

But it was not at the splendid scene which lay before them that they looked.

On the present occasion the beauties of Nature had no charms for them.

They were looking for traces of their foes.

But, though they looked long and carefully, they were unable to see anything of their pursuers.

It was too much to hope that they had given up the chase.

Still, as we have said, there were no signs of them to be seen, although our friends had such a good post from which to take an observation.

It was Dick Turpin who first turned round and broke the silence which had fallen upon the little party.

"I cannot see anything of our foes," he said, "but we must not allow that circumstance to lull us into a state of false security. If we do, we shall assuredly be taken by surprise, and perish."

"You are right enough there, Dick," muttered his comrades.

"We must keep ourselves constantly on the alert, and betake ourselves to some place of safety. It is not possible that the occurrences of last night will be allowed to pass over without notice. The authorities had fully determined upon making an end of us, and they will be enraged accordingly, when they find we have escaped. Then that web is a serious business; and then to conclude, there is the burning of Newgate. All these events, my friends, will have the effect of directing the attention of the whole of the country to us, which will materially increase the danger that has always environed us. This is very serious, and demands our attention; and, to come to the point I wished to reach, what have you made up your minds to do in the future?"

"That entirely depends upon yourself, Dick," said Claude Duval; "we are quite ready to place ourselves under your direction, and be guided by you. I am, however, of rather a different opinion to yourself with respect to the consequences of last night's actions."

"How so?"

"You take too serious a view of it. That we shall be the focus of a great deal of attention in consequence of what has been done, I do not attempt to deny, but that we shall be in any more danger than we have been all along, I beg leave to dispute."

"On what grounds?"

"The simplest in the world."

"I am curious to hear them."

"Then I will tell you. For a long time past the authorities have done their best to capture and destroy us. They have made every effort—strained every nerve. But they have failed. Is this true, or is it not?"

"It is quite true."

"Very well, then. If the authorities have been trying to do their best, you will very much oblige me by telling me how they can do any more."

There was a general laugh at this.

"I think it is quite clear," said Dick Turpin, "that if I take too serious a view of the matter, you take too trivial a one. You are certainly open to that accusation. At any rate, it is necessary we should be exceedingly cautious and careful."

"Oh! certainly—certainly. Public attention will be fixed upon us for the space of nine days perhaps, and during that time the burning of Newgate will form a general topic of conversation, but after that you may rely upon it things will resume their wonted course."

"There is a good deal of sense in your remarks, Claude," said Dick Turpin; "and now that we have got so far, and now that we appear to have a favourable opportunity, I do not think we can do a better thing than walk our horses gently along the road, and talk over our future plans and prospects."

"We ought to do so."

"We have already broken the ice, so let us continue. There are no police-officers in sight, so we will go down the hill gently and talk."

"Agreed."

"If you like, I will tell you what my opinions are."

"Do so—do so."

"There will be such an outcry made about what has taken place, that even were they not inclined to do so, as they are, the public voice would compel them to put into execution some very energetic means of effecting our capture."

"I should not wonder."

"Nor I."

"Still, that is not much to dread," persisted Claude.

"We shall see."

"Very true."

"But, just suppose for a moment that the authorities should talk it into their heads to organize a very strong force, whose especial duty it should be to search the

country for us, what, in your opinion, would be the best means we could adopt in order to secure our safety?"

"That is a question more easily asked than answered."

"So I am aware."

"Still, it is not unanswerable."

"You have something to propose, then?"

"I have."

CHAPTER CCCLIII.

THE FOUR HIGHWAYMEN REACH ENFIELD CHASE, A SAFETY, AND DICK TURPIN IS MADE CAPTAIN OF THE BAND.

DICK TURPIN, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack looked, with an expression of great interest visible in their features, at the face of Claude Duval when he uttered the words with which the preceding chapter concluded.

Claude had showed himself rather more inclined to take the lead than usual.

"Let us hear your answer," cried his comrades; "and, if your scheme is a good one, we will adopt it."

"You are very kind."

"Come, the answer."

"In the event, then, of the occurrence of such a circumstance as you have mentioned, I should advise, in order to ensure our mutual safety, that we should plunge into some thinly-populated part of the country—where there is a forest, for example—and that we should there secrete ourselves until such time as we should find it safe to emerge. In the intricacies of a forest we could easily set all the efforts of our enemies at defiance."

"Excellent—excellent," exclaimed Claude's three companions, who immediately caught at the idea he wished to convey to them. "Most excellent."

"I am glad the bare outline of my scheme, for it is nothing more, is so well appreciated by you."

"The idea is most excellent," cried Dick Turpin.

"The more I think of it, the better it pleases me, and the more confident I feel that it will enable us to elude our foes."

"Of course it will; but you must bear in mind that a great part of safety will rely upon our whereabouts being kept a secret."

"Certainly."

"Well, then, since you are so pleased, what do you say to putting my plan into force at once? I don't know when we shall have a better chance than we have at present. It is beyond a doubt that there are none of our enemies in sight, and we have left no track by which we can be followed from the hill where we doubled upon them."

"Do you know of any place that would answer our purpose, or that corresponds with the description you have given?"

"It is a long time since I was in that part of the country, but I can recollect that, years back, there used to be an extensive forest near the village of Enfield. It was not exactly a forest either, because it was called Enfield Chase."

"I have heard of the place you name," said Dick Turpin, "though I have not been there to my knowledge. Do you think, then, that this Enfield Chase, if it remains in the condition it was in when you saw it last, would be likely to answer our purpose?"

"I do."

"Why so?"

"It is in a very quiet, out-of-the-way place, and is but little known. I think you three were all but ignorant of its existence."

"So we were."

"It is, however, a vast place. A hundred men might conceal themselves in. Then, as for provisions, we should never want, for the Chase abounds with some of the finest deer that can be found in England."

"Bravo! excellent!" exclaimed Dick. "I see, we are going to lead a Robin-Hood sort of life in the greenwood."

"Just so; and we shall be four merry men, I promise you. If we can but gain this place unperceived, I am sure we cannot do better than remain there for a week, by which time the occurrences of last night will be best part forgotten, and, from our not having been seen during that period, people will come to the conclusion that we have left the country."

"I like Claude's plan vastly," said Sixteen-String Jack. "As you said a little while ago, Dick, the more I think of it, the better I like it. I question whether any place could be thought of offering us more chances of concealment and fewer of discovery."

"I am perfectly agreeable to it," said Tom King. "While admitting the force and efficiency of all your arguments, it would be very agreeable as a change from the cells of Newgate, which are by no means to my liking."

"Then it seems," said Dick, "we are quite unanimous upon this point."

"Quite."

"Very good; then we will make our way to Enfield Chase at once—that is, if Claude Duval will direct the way."

"I dare say I shall be able to do that when I have considered our bearings a little. Let me see. Yes; if we keep along this road until we come to the next turning on the right, and go down that until we emerge into the high-road again, we shall only have to follow that to reach the place I have named."

"Very good, then. Let us increase our speed a little, because, having made up our minds where we are going, the sooner we reach our destination the better. You, Claude, lead the way."

In this light-hearted manner the four highwaymen made their way towards the place which they had agreed upon for a resting-place.

No one to have seen them laughing and chatting gaily, as though such a thing as care was utterly unknown to them, would have guessed the part they played on the preceding night.

It was the joy of their reunion which went a good way towards banishing those gloomy feelings which they might individually have felt.

Dick had been separated from his companions for a long time—ages it seemed to them—and they were rejoiced to once more see him in their midst.

We need not trouble the reader with the details of their journey to Enfield Chase.

This magnificent forest, though now no longer in existence, was, at the time of which we are writing, in full glory.

Its size was somewhere about equal to that of Epping forest at the present day.

It was thickly grown with trees of all description, and stocked with deer, which fully deserved the eulogy that Claude Duval passed upon them.

Other kinds of game were to be found there in abundance.

Scarcely a tree now stands to mark the spot where this royal chase once stood.

It was disforested in the year 1779, and since that time it has rapidly dwindled away until it has become merely a thing of the past, and ere long it will be forgotten that there was ever such a place in existence.

It was a capital suggestion of Claude Duval's, that they should make this extensive chase their hiding and abiding place, and his comrades acted very wisely in falling in with it.

Indeed, it may be questioned whether, if they had perplexed their brains for months, they could have hit upon any plan so likely to set at naught any exertions their enemies might make to effect their capture.

If they reached the chase, and fairly plunged into its tangled recesses without being seen to do so, they were what might be called safe.

Nothing but some extraordinary accident could discover them.

The chase itself, admirably adapted for concealment as it was, had many other special recommendations.

It was situated in a part of the country that was but thinly inhabited, and in a place which really deserved the appellation of out of the way.

It was about three hours before noon when the four highwaymen arrived at the outskirts of Enfield Chase.

All the way they had been careful to keep a very sharp look out, and from time to time had ascended trees and eminences in order to assure themselves that they were not followed.

Upon no occasion had they seen the least signs of a human being.

Indeed, the only living creatures which had fallen under their vision were the cattle in the pastures.

Even these were few in number.

With hearts full of hope, then, our four friends guided their horses beneath the wide-spreading branches of the stately trees, and fairly entered the chase.

Each step they took filled them with delight.

Having been cooped up between walls so long as they had, our friends felt all the keener enjoyment of what they saw.

But the scenery around them was of such a beautiful sylvan character, that no one could withhold their admiration, no matter how dead they might be to the appreciation of the beautiful.

It was autumn, and the trees presented that variegated appearance which they always do at that season of the year.

The bare branches were not yet exposed, though decaying leaves lay in large quantities upon the ground.

The morning was one of unusual fineness for the season. It was like summer.

The birds carolled sweetly in the trees, and in the air there was that delicious hum which is often heard in the country, and which proceeds from thousands of insects.

With the exception of this hum, and the faint rustling of the boughs of the trees, there was not a sound to break the profound silence.

As they proceeded, however, taking their course in a direct line into the centre of the chase, the murmuring of a waterfall came upon their ears.

The faint, rushing, gurgling noise of the water, as it bubbled over some obstruction, sounded pleasantly on the ear.

The mimic stream was not, however, discernible.

It was hidden by the dense undergrowth with which the chase was covered.

The ground had a downward tendency, and presently our friends found themselves in a kind of dell, or dingle, which was of more than magic beauty.

Its sides were clothed with trees of every imaginable shape and hue, while down one side the little brook they had heard, came pouring in a kind of mimic cascade.

The water was sparkling and bright, and with the sun shining upon it with full power, it looked doubly so.

It fell into a kind of natural basin which it had hollowed out of the soft rock.

From this there arose a cloud of spray.

Never in their lives had the highwaymen seen a scene of such enchanting loveliness, and so much delighted were they with it, that they resolved to halt there and go no further.

Accordingly they dismounted, and tethered their horses to the trees in such a manner that they could crop the short, sweet herbage which grew there in abundance, covering the ground as with an emerald carpet.

Our friends sat down close to the little waterfall, and quenched their thirst with its pure fluid.

All were charmed with the spot, and declared they could make it a permanent residence if it was necessary.

Birds of various kinds flew about in every direction, and from their tameness, it was pretty certain that they had remained for a long time unmolested.

The highwaymen were furnished with arms and ammunition, so, as they sat, they amused themselves by firing. They soon brought down enough birds to last them for the day.

The reports of the pistols sounded with great loudness in that silent spot, but they considered they had penetrated far enough into the forest for it. ☞ *safe*.

A short search among the neighbouring bushes soon supplied them with an ample store of fuel in the shape of dry twigs and grass.

These they made into a heap, and set fire to by means of the flint attached to the locks of their pistols and a little gunpowder.

In rather a primitive fashion the birds were dressed, and hung before the fire to roast.

But hungry men are easily satisfied, and our friends were content because they could have nothing better.

They were as happy and contented as it was possible for any four human beings to be.

That Dick Turpin really did for a time make a home in Enfield Chase is a matter of history.

Such was actually the case.

An anecdote the writer once heard, and which now seems to his recollection, will bear out the truth of it.

It was from the lips of a personal friend—a gentleman well known to the reading public by his powerful writings—that the author heard the anecdote.

He stated that, when a young man—now about fifty years since—he was on a visit to Enfield, and, during his stay, spent a great deal of time in rambling about the chase, the beauties of which filled him with admiration.

In these excursions he was generally accompanied by an old gray-headed man, who held the post of steward over the estates belonging to the gentleman with whom he was staying.

This gray-headed man, from the fact of his always from a boy having resided within a short distance of the chase, was intimately acquainted with all its intricacies, so he was admirably qualified for a guide to lead the way to those places which were worthy of notice.

On one of these occasions the steward paused opposite to a tree, and pointed out to his companion a large iron hook, which was very cleverly concealed under one of the lower branches.

This hook was rusty, and over-grown with moss.

It was driven firmly into the trunk of the tree.

On being asked his reason for pointing out this hook, the old steward replied—

"I never fail to show that hook to anyone who accompanies me to the chase. It is full of interest to me, and so it will presently be to you."

"In years long back, many and many a fat buck taken from the king's deer has been hung upon it."

"But by whom?"

"By my uncle."

"Your uncle?"

"Yes."

"Then he was a deer-stealer."

The steward nodded.

"And a good many other things besides."

"But it seems strange that you should point out to a stranger the crimes of one of your relations."

"It does seem so; but do you know who my uncle was?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear of the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin?"

"A thousand times; but surely you are not his nephew?"

"I am," replied the steward. "Dick Turpin, the highwayman, was no other than my uncle. I believe I am the only descendant of the family that now remains alive, and, as you see, I am an old man and not likely to live many years longer."

"But you have children?"

"No."

"Then you are the last of your race."

"I am. My name is George Turpin. Now look at that hook. Dick Turpin has hung many a king's deer upon it, and it has been pointed out to you by the only relative of the highwayman in existence."

CHAPTER CCCLIV.

DICK TURPIN BIDS FAREWELL TO HIS COMRADES, AND SETS OUT UPON HIS PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

SUCH is the substance of the anecdote related to the author when the first number of this romance was published. It is interesting from its personality, and about its authenticity there can be no doubt, for upon making enquiries in the neighbourhood, the gentleman alluded to found that what the old steward had told him was quite correct.

Like most other persons, this gentleman felt a deep interest in any little personal particulars connected with the bold highwayman, and he had frequent conversations with the steward upon the subject.

In this way he became possessed of many little details that would have remained unknown, but of which the writer, as the narrative proceeds, will be enabled to avail himself.

He found the steward, who was a trustworthy, confidential servant, was the only son of Dick Turpin's only brother.

"It was through my father," said the old man, "on one occasion, that my uncle Dick got into trouble."

"Indeed," asked the gentleman; "and how was that?"

"In a very strange manner. Dick Turpin, after his famous ride to York, was apprehended on suspicion, and lodged in York Castle, which, as I dare say you know, serves the purpose of a prison."

"I have heard as much."

"Well, when he was apprehended the officers did not know who he was, and Dick accordingly gave them a false name. The crime of which he was accused was a highway robbery, which I firmly believe he never committed."

"Do I understand you to say that your uncle was apprehended on a charge of highway robbery, and lodged in York Castle, without the authorities knowing who he really was?"

"Just so. That is the case. Well, my uncle thought he should be easily enough able to prove an alibi, and thus escape; so he bribed one of the jailers in the prison to bring him pens, ink, and paper. This done, he sat down and wrote a letter to my father—that is, to his brother."

"I quite understand you."

"Well, in this letter he was very explicit. He told him how he had been apprehended on a false charge, and how he should be easily able to escape if my father would only come forward and say where he was at the time when the crime was alleged to have been committed. In this letter he also told my father that he had not given his real name, but a false one, and cautioned him not on any account to let his real name be known, for if he did, it would be all over with him."

"And did your father refuse to come forward?"

"I will tell you, sir. Having written the letter, the substance of which I have made you acquainted with, my uncle carefully sealed it up, and then, watching his opportunity, got the jailer he had bribed to carry the letter to the post. It was addressed to my father at Thaxted, in Essex, where he dwelt, and the postage amounted to one-and-tenpence. Dick gave the jailer a crown piece, and expressly desired him to pre-pay the letter, and added that he might keep the change."

"Well, sir, you would have thought the jailer would have executed this little commission all right, but he did not."

"He took the letter to the post-office, and dropped the letter into the box without paying the postage at all, thus keeping the crown piece to himself."

"And what was the result?"

"Why, very serious indeed to my uncle, as you shall hear. In due time the letter reached Thaxted, and when it arrived my father found there was three-and-eightpence to pay. Now, only the week before some friends of his had played him a trick by sending a blank sheet of paper through the post in the form of a letter, and causing him to pay two-and-fourpence for it. Of course he was vexed, for no man likes to be made a fool of."

"Now, when this second letter arrived, the first thing he thought of was how he had been duped before, so he looked at the postmark, and found it York."

"He knew very well he had no one in that part of the country to whom he was related, or who would be likely to write to him; so, convinced this was only another trick, and that he should be laughed at again, he resolutely refused to take the letter."

"In the end it was carried away and forwarded to London, where it was opened, in order to see by whom the letter was sent, and so as to be able to return it to him. Well, of course, when the letter was opened at the post-office, London, the whole secret was out. The police were communicated with, and Dick was detected."

"This, and much more, did the old steward communicate, and the writer will be able to embody these facts in the narrative when the proper time for doing so arrives."

"For the present, however, we must confine ourselves to a relation of the occurrences which immediately took place."

"In accordance with the suggestion of Claude Duval, they remained for the space of one week without daring either individually or collectively to stir from their hiding-place."

"They had rather a rough time of it, for, though the days were fine, the nights were cold, and they could find nothing better than the trees to shelter them."

"But they were unmolested, and this compensated for a great many of the inconveniences they were compelled to endure."

Their time was pretty fully occupied in telling each other's adventures."

"At length, on the evening of the seventh day after their arrival in the chase, and just as it was beginning to grow dusk, Dick Turpin called his comrades around him."

"We have been here a week now," he said; "and what Claude said has proved quite right, for I don't believe there is another place in England where we could remain so long undisturbed."

"Nor I."

"But, my gallant comrades, it is quite time we ascertained what was going on in the world. We are complete strangers to the transactions of the past few days, and who knows how important it may be to us to learn the transactions of the last week."

"I have been thinking about that," said Tom King.

"In fact, I may say, we have all been thinking about it, and, if you had not spoken just when you did, I should have made a request which I will warrant now is forestalled."

"My friends, I dare say you feel as anxious as I do to know what has happened. I am exceedingly anxious, and would fain gain some particulars."

"I know what you mean," said Claude Duval. "You want us to go to London, and we will do it."

"You are not quite right, Claude, this time. I want to learn what has taken place, but I do not want you with me."

"Oh!"

"I will tell you why not. It appears to me that, if they are making search after us, they will look to find us all four together. For this reason, I think—if I go alone, I shall not run so much risk of detection."

"I partly agree with you," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but not altogether."

"Where is the difference?"

"Why, it will be better for one to go than four; but, then, I don't think you are the most suitable one."

"Why not?"

"Because you are the best known of all four of us, and the most likely to be recognised. Now, with me the case would be different."

"I know all you are going to say, Jack," interrupted Turpin, "so you can spare your breath. You want to convince us that you are the person best qualified to go. In fact, you all want to go."

"That's about it," said Tom King.

"But need I say how injudicious such a course would be? Only one must go. And there is another thing I wish to remind you of."

"What is it?"

"When you have asked me about my mare, Black Bess, I have invariably told you she was in perfect security, and I firmly believe that such is the case. But we must not doom ourselves to a life of perpetual inaction here. Such a life would never do for me. 'Hurrah for the road!' is my motto."

"And mine—and mine!" said his comrades.

"I know it. And now let me ask you a question. What would Dick Turpin have been without his bonny Black Bess? Why, nothing—absolutely nothing. The fame all belongs to her; and, if we are to go on the road again, as I hope we shall for many and many a bright night, how could I hope to achieve anything without her?"

The three highwaymen waited to hear what further he had to say.

"I could not hope to achieve anything. Now, I alone know where she is, and this is the proposition I wish to make to you. Will you three remain here for the remainder of to-night, and allow me to set out upon my two-fold errand; namely, to fetch Black Bess, and to ascertain what has taken place in London during our absence from it?"

"It is very necessary that we should obtain the information, and also that you should regain possession of your mare, but that does not make the slightest difference to what I said."

"How so?"

"It will be better, and less hazardous, for me to go to London than yourself; and then, as for not knowing where Black Bess is to be found, you can tell me that, and then there will be an end of that difficulty."

"Not quite," said Dick, with a smile, "though I see

you are bent upon going if you can. The persons in whose charge Black Bess is left will deliver her to no one but myself, and so it will be useless for you to try."

"You mean you are bent upon going, Dick. However we shan't say you nay. Indeed, I will tell you what we have made up our minds to do."

"What?"

"What we made up our minds to a very long time ago, but which we have never been able to carry out, from the interposition of adverse circumstances."

Dick smiled.

He guessed what was coming.

Sixteen-String Jack continued:

"We have resolved," he said, "to make you our captain, to place ourselves entirely under your control—to elect you, in fact, our leader. We have already done so, in fact, and now the time has come for the arrangement to be carried out."

"You will force this honour upon me," said Dick, "though, if you will believe me, I would much rather be without the responsibility. Still I am well aware of the advantages which must always accrue from a leader—upon having some one whose word shall decide what is to be done in the moment of danger."

"That is just it. And you consent?"

"How can I refuse?"

"Three cheers, comrades."

The highwaymen gave three lusty cheers, which made the old chase ring again, and then Dick said:

"I warn you I shall take advantage of the authority you have vested in me to do just what I was proposing a little while ago."

"I expected that."

"We must give way," said the others.

"I trust you will," said Dick. "For my own safety's sake you may depend I shall be very careful. I will make what inquiries I can, and then, without further delay, I shall make my way to Winberry Hall, for it is there I left Black Bess."

"And I hope you will find her all right again, Dick."

"I hope so too. Not that I have any doubts."

"You have got the whole of the night before you, so you ought to be able to conduct your enterprise comfortably."

"Yes, the night is young yet, but do not in consequence of that expect me too soon. I may be detained, but something will be wrong if I am not back by day-break."

"We shall be anxiously expecting you, captain."

"Above all things, do not be tempted to roam from this spot, no matter how great may be the inducement. The consequence of your so doing might be serious, and I should be deeply vexed if so capital a place of concealment as this has proved to be is discovered."

"It would be a thousand pities."

"It would indeed, and therefore I hope you will be guided by what I say. And now I will prepare to start; there could not be a more favourable time."

In this Dick was perfectly correct.

Evening was just deepening into night, and a vague kind of obscurity prevailed everywhere, which had the effect of confusing all objects.

Dick selected the best horse of the four, and rapidly put on his saddle and bridle.

That done, he mounted.

He felt something more like himself than he had done for a long time past.

He looked carefully to his weapons, and took care to be well supplied with ammunition.

Then, fully armed and accoutred for the rather perilous undertaking he was about to perform, Dick Turpin, followed on foot by his three faithful comrades, took his way at a walking pace towards the borders of the chase.

Just visible above the tree-tops was the rising moon, and this enabled Dick to direct his course with tolerable certainty.

He wished to proceed due west, so all he had to do was to keep his back to the moon.

But little was said on their way to the borders of the chase.

All four, however, were busily occupied with their thoughts.

At length, when the increasing thinness of the vegetation, and distance from tree to tree, warned them

that they would soon emerge into the open country, the little party paused.

It was Dick Turpin who halted first.

The probability is, that if he had not taken the initiative in the matter, his companions would have continued walking by his side for some distance further yet.

"Farewell," he said, raising his cap as he spoke. "We had better part here. You may expect to see me here to-morrow by daylight, accompanied by Black Bess."

"Farewell, captain," said the three highwaymen, taking off their hats, and bowing profoundly to Dick. "Farewell, captain. A safe journey to you."

Waving his hat, Dick reiterated his injunctions for them not to attempt to leave the place until he returned. Then, striking his spurs into his horse's flanks, he rode rapidly away.

CHAPTER CCCIV.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN ARE PURSUED BY THE POLICE.

THE strange adventures which befel Claude Duval, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack in Enfield Chase after parting with their captain, must be deferred to another chapter.

So much interest is attached to the expedition . . . which Dick was about to set out that we are perforce compelled to follow him, and narrate what adventures he met with upon the road.

The reader will doubtless not be at a loss to find the true reason for Dick being so very anxious to fetch Black Bess himself.

It was not that his comrade could not find Winberry Hall, or that Black Bess would not be delivered to him when he did find it, and applied for her.

No, neither of these was the reason.

The fact was, that Dick could not banish the recollection of the beautiful Maud Gouldman from his mind.

To be sure, he did not try to banish all thoughts of her quite so hard as he might have done.

Dick loved her.

For the first time in his life he felt the influence of that power of which some dillards have attempted to deny the existence.

Ever since the first time he had seen her he loved her, and all subsequent events had only tended to increase the violence of his passion.

It was for her dear sake that he had perilled his life and liberty in the way he had, and very nearly forfeited both.

But now he was free he felt an insatiable desire to see her, and he rejoiced to think he had so good an excuse ready at his hand as that which fetching Black Bess afforded him.

With his mind filled with pleasant thoughts Dick took his way along the broad high-road.

His blood coursed through his veins.

As the poet says—

"His bosom's lord sat lightly on his throne."

Higher and higher climbed the moon, and as she rose in the pure blue vault her light became brighter, and fell with a wondrous and beautiful effulgence upon the various objects in the landscape.

But her brightest rays seemed to glitter and fall upon the person of the highwayman and upon his steed.

Very handsome and very picturesque he looked in the romantic light.

His body was erect and his head high.

A pleasant smile was on his lips.

From time to time he spoke kind and encouraging words to his steed.

Only a little time would have to elapse, he told himself, and then he should bestride his bonny mare Black Bess.

That would be a delight of no common order.

So eager was he to reach Winberry Hall, that he departed from the agreement he had made with his comrades.

This was, that he should first proceed to London and learn the state of affairs, and then go for Black Bess.

But, now that he was upon the road, Dick determined upon leaving London until the last as being less important.

After proceeding for some distance across the country



[BLACK BESS RECOGNISES HER MASTER.]

from east to west, he stood up in the stirrups and looked about him.

He seemed to recognise his locality, for he nodded his head complacently, and continued on his way.

Dick met with many vehicles and travellers in the course of his journey, but he drew aside and avoided all of them.

Without the occurrence, then, of any important or interesting incident he arrived in front of Winberry-Hall.

He recognised it in a moment.

As it stood before him, the occasion when he had first looked upon the structure rushed vividly across his mind.

The whole place now seemed to him to wear an air of desolation.

There were no lights visible at any of the numerous windows, though the hour was too early a one for the inmates of the hall to have retired to rest.

For some moments Dick sat unmoved upon his steed looking at the building.

Then, recovering from his fit of abstraction, he touched his horse slightly with the spur.

He directed his course to the door at the back of the

hall which he so well remembered, and through which he had so often passed.

The back of the hall faced the south, and the moon was now near the meridian.

Consequently her beams poured down upon it with full force.

He could distinguish every object with the greatest ease.

There was the door.

There were the stables.

There was the pump, the never-to-be-forgotten pump, under which Mr. Josiah Skinner had received such a well-merited punishment.

But, taking only a hasty glance at these things, Dick rode up to the door and dismounted.

He then knocked lightly upon the panels with his riding-whip.

To him it seemed an age before his summons was attended to, but in reality only a few seconds elapsed.

A domestic unknown to Dick opened the door.

He carried a candle in his hand, and looked curiously and suspiciously at our hero.

"What is it you want?" he asked, in a voice that well corresponded with the expression upon his features.

Dick hesitated a moment before he gave a reply, and the servant repeated his inquiry in a tone of the greatest impatience.

But Dick, who had made up his mind how to reply, said—

"I wish to see Mr. Shockley, the steward. Be good enough to ask him to come here to the door and speak to me."

As he uttered these words, Dick slipped into the hand of the surly domestic a coin.

The touch of the precious metal produced an immediate change in his behaviour, and, desiring Dick to wait a moment, he hurried off to deliver the message.

Dick had not long to wait.

The summons was such an unusual one that the worthy steward made all possible haste to respond to it.

He recognised Turpin in a moment, though he did not betray his recognition otherwise than by a start, which escaped the notice of the domestic who had brought the message, and who, at the command of Shockley, now retired.

"And can it really be you, sir, that I see?" he said.

"You may credit the evidence of your own eyes; but time is precious to me, Shockley. Tell me, is your young mistress in the house?"

"She is, sir."

"And her companion?"

"Miss Maud?"

"Yes."

"Yes, she is within."

"Let them know that I am here, Shockley. If they will vouchsafe me an interview, I should feel gratified. I should not like to think that I have seen them for the last time."

"They will see you, I am sure."

"Why so?"

"I have heard them speak about you so often."

"Well then, Shockley, announce me; and, if you will permit me, I will stay here and await the result of the announcement."

"No, no; come in."

"I would much rather stay here. Let me have my own way: I will wait here."

"Well, since you will have it so, I suppose I must give way."

With these words on his lips, Shockley turned away.

Dick listened to his footsteps as he walked along the paved flooring of the hall.

He returned in a moment, and said—

"The young ladies will see you. Come this way."

Dick now did not hesitate to enter.

He followed the steward along the hall to the door of the room he knew so well.

Here they halted, and Dick was shown into the apartment in which his first mysterious interview with Maud Gouldman had taken place.

Little did he imagine what would be the consequences of that interview.

As he crossed the threshold he cast an anxious glance around him, but somewhat to his relief the room appeared to be empty.

And the words uttered by Shockley were confirmatory of this, for he said—

"Sit down a moment, sir. The ladies said you were to wait, and that they would be here directly."

The steward withdrew as he spoke, closing the door after him.

Slowly Dick crossed the vast antique apartment.

As on the occasion which was so vividly before his mind, there was no other light in the room save that which the fire afforded.

This, however, was amply sufficient for all purposes of illumination, with the exception, perhaps, of reading or writing.

The fire was composed partly of coal and partly of wood, and it sent up a large bright flame into the chimney.

Dick sat down on one of the antique chairs by the fire-side, and waited for the coming of Blanche and Maud.

Maud! His heart beat strangely and his breath came irregularly from his lungs as he mentally pronounced her name.

Before he had time to indulge any further in his reflections the door opened, and the object of his

thoughts, accompanied by Blanche Winberry, appeared before him.

Dick rose, of course, in a moment, and bent low in profound salutation.

They acknowledged his bow, and then, with that ease which good breeding can alone bestow, requested him to be seated.

In this they set him the example.

They indicated a chair which was placed exactly in front of the fire, while they sat down upon either side of it.

There was a silence of a moment's duration, and Dick, fearful that it might grow into a pause of embarrassment, hastened to begin the conversation.

"I trust, ladies," he said, in those deep, rich, and yet respectful tones which he knew so well how to assume, and which never failed to cause a feeling of interest in the breasts of his auditors, should they be of the softer sex, "I trust you will excuse this intrusion, but"—

"I cannot accept of any excuses or apologies from you," said Blanche Winberry, "so do not utter them."

Dick bowed.

He was much struck with the altered tones of her voice.

They expressed a world of sadness, suffering, and woe.

Such tones striking upon a sensitive ear would be almost sufficient to produce tears.

But how much had the poor girl suffered!

She had suddenly found herself bereft of every hope.

Her father, whom she loved with that passionate adoration sometimes experienced by an only daughter to her sole surviving parent, had been snatched from her under circumstances of the most terrible anguish.

Then the young man, for whom she felt an undying, unalterable affection, and which sprang up in her breast at once, and continued to burn with undiminished vehemency—that young man who loved her, too, with an affection only equalled by her own—what a terrible barrier had sprung up between them.

Her dreams of bliss had been rudely and violently dissipated.

He was the son of her father's murderer.

Oh! horrible combination of events!

Under the affliction which the bereavement of her father occasioned, what a solace it would have been to her had there been some one who possessed her heart, and to whom she could unburthen all her sorrows!

But this was denied her, and fresh cause for poignant grief given instead.

From the time they had parted in the court she had seen nothing of him.

He had studiously kept himself aloof from her, and had not made the slightest overture.

He felt that it would be hopeless.

That the gulf which yawned between them was so wide as to be quite impassable.

And for this the love she felt for him, and always should feel, was increased.

It bore out the estimate she had formed of his character.

But, without any description of ours, we think the reader, placed as he is in full possession of all the extraordinary incidents relating to this affair, will be able to picture for himself the grief of this young girl, and the effect which it must have, both bodily and mentally, upon her.

Then Maud Gouldman was not less wretched than her much-loved Blanche.

The reader cannot have failed to penetrate the secret of her heart.

She loved Dick Turpin.

Loved him with all the fond fervour which might be expected from so romantic an attachment.

It was in vain she called in common-sense and reason to her aid.

Those good and safe counsellors were unable to make themselves heard above the voice of love, which spoke with impassioned accents in her heart.

And now, when she gazed upon the really handsome countenance of the highwayman, and marked his robust and symmetrical figure—coming, as both did, so fully up to the idea of what a man should be, she felt her passion for the bold highwayman increase.

CHAPTER CCCLVI.

BLANCHE WINBERRY COMMUNICATES SOME IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE TO DICK TURPIN

A SLIGHT pause had followed the last words spoken by Blanche Winberry, but now Dick Turpin hastened to break it.

"You excuse this intrusion, then," he said, smiling slightly. "I thought you would, or otherwise I should not have ventured here. My errand is, however, a simple one; it is to assure you of my safety, and to request you to give me back my steed, for which you have been kind enough to provide an asylum."

"We have heard of your escape," said Blanche, "and have taken pains to learn all the particulars of it that we possibly could. How you have reached here in safety I know not."

"I have met with no opposition; but, pardon me, your last speech seems to intimate something more than it expresses."

"It does."

"To what did you allude?"

"I believe the police have had some sort of suspicion that you would make your way here, for they have several times surprised us, and insisted upon making a thorough search of the hall."

"Indeed," said Dick, contracting his brows. "I am much vexed that you should have been subjected to so much annoyance on my account."

"Do not mention it. So long as you were not here I did not care, and I thought while the officers were here upon a false scent, you might be somewhere else in safety."

"I cannot express my thanks for this feeling in my behalf."

"Nor need you. What I have done has been in requital of what you have done for me, and when the two are placed together, how insignificant mine seems! Can I ever forget that had it not been for your generous behaviour, a villain would have succeeded in effecting his purposes? Had it not been for your self-sacrifice, I should not be here now, nor would my father's murderer have been discovered."

Her voice faltered as she made this allusion to her father, and Dick, who always felt uneasy when he heard his own praises sounded, hastened to change the topic of conversation.

"You have said the police have been here."

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Three times."

"Indeed. Their suspicions must have been strong, then. When was the last time?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And how did they depart?"

"Apparently satisfied that it was no good looking here any longer."

"Apparently satisfied?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I fancy they are not satisfied. Shockley told me he was almost certain they were lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood."

"This is serious."

"It may be so; but, should the officers make another attack to-night, be under no apprehension—they will not find you. I shall be enabled to show my gratitude."

"I accept that, then, as an assurance of safety," said Turpin, cheerfully. "I have kept myself closely concealed during the past week, in a place where my foes would never think of looking for me."

"I am rejoiced to think you have got so secure a place in which to conceal yourself."

"My comrades are there now awaiting my return. We have been kept close prisoners, and they are impatient in the extreme to be set at liberty."

"They must be cautious. The authorities are using the most strenuous efforts to secure your apprehension and their also. They are determined that the daring outrage you have committed shall not go unpunished."

"Ah! well," said Dick, "we shall see! I am not afraid of them! I have set them at defiance for a long time now."

"You have, indeed."

"And shall do again, never fear for that!—and when I have Black Bess once again."

"She is quite safe," said Maud, breaking the silence which she had preserved all through the interview. "I have seen to her safety and comfort myself."

"Many thanks!" said Turpin, his soul thrilling with the music of the words he had just heard. "When I am once seated upon her back, I shall care nothing for my foes."

"We have trembled for your safety many and many a time," said Blanche, "and we were pleased beyond measure when Shockley told us you were here."

In acknowledgment of this Dick could merely bow.

"I am not insensible," he said, "of all that you have done on my behalf. The judge who showed himself so warm a friend to me told me all about it."

"It was all done out of gratitude," said Blanche. "Indeed, when I think back upon the past, I seem as though I should never be able to show myself sufficiently grateful, and to repay you would be impossible."

"Enough! enough!" said Dick, "I did my duty; and if this is what may be considered a good action, I trust it will palliate the many bad ones that I have in my lifetime committed. I can assure you that, had I the same motives, I would do the same thing to-morrow."

"I do not doubt your singleness of mind; but what a dreadful fate it was that overtook my uncle."

"Dreadful, indeed!"

"Far worse than he deserved."

"Perhaps so. His sufferings must have been terrible; but the mob was incensed, and it would have been as easy to quench the raging of the sea as to have caused them to desist."

"I know it."

"I was not, thank heaven! a witness of that scene, but my comrades told me the particulars of it."

"And what has become of Skinner, and the other two accomplices of my uncle's?"

"I know not. Probably they were set free along with the rest of the prisoners, and have escaped."

"I have heard nothing of them, though I have made every inquiry."

"Perhaps, then, you would be able to afford me some information with respect to what has taken place in the metropolis during the past week."

"You mean with respect to yourself?"

"Just so."

"I have not much to tell beyond what I have already told you. The police authorities, assisted by the military, are making the most strenuous efforts to capture all four of you, and should they do so, no doubt their proceedings would be very summary indeed!"

"I do not doubt it. And now, what about the prison?"

"Newgate?"

"Yes."

"We drove past there three days ago."

"And how did the place look?"

"It is nothing but a ruin. The ruins were smouldering and smoking even then, and a large number of people were assembled, gazing upon it. Nothing but the strongest walls remain, and they are charred and blackened by the intense heat. The whole place will have to be rebuilt."

"Is it possible?"

"Do not let my description, however, so far influence you, as to make your curiosity overcome your prudence."

"Well, I will confess that I should much like to look upon the scene, but that idea must, I suppose, be abandoned."

"If you place any value upon your life."

"The excitement will soon subside, however."

"It cannot long remain up to the present pitch."

"I reckoned upon its having quite or nearly died away by this time."

"Then you will be disappointed, for I think it is fiercer than ever. You are quite safe here, however, for there are hiding-places in the hall so cunningly contrived that they would defy detection."

"Do you anticipate an attack?"

"I have no reason for doing so, but you may have been seen to enter the place."

"I think not. I knew there was danger, and I omitted no precautions."

Blanche rose as he spoke, and rang a bell.

"You will partake of some refreshments ere you leave?" she said.

Dick bowed.

Shockley appeared.

"Have supper laid in the dining-room, Shockley."

"Yes, miss," replied the old steward, retiring to execute her order.

"I must not stay here too long," said Turpin, "though I shall be loath to tear myself away, but I promised my comrades I would return before daybreak, and I must make some allowance in case of interruptions on the road."

"Have you far to go to reach your destination?"

"Yes, many miles; and my comrades will be alarmed if I am later than the time I mentioned."

At this moment the steward returned to say that the supper was quite ready.

Dick and the two ladies followed him to the dining-room.

The interior of Winberry Hall was tolerably familiar to Dick in consequence of his stay there.

A comfortable meal was laid upon the table, and Dick did not omit to do justice to the good things before him, for his fare of late had been something of the roughest.

How long they would have permitted him to stay is more than we could determine, nor was Turpin at all anxious to quit company so pleasant.

As he from time to time stole a glance at Maud Gouldman, and saw how lovely she was, his heart burned with love, but that was soon succeeded by an aching sensation when he thought of the difference between them.

Dick Turpin, however intoxicated he might be with love, was not oblivious of the fact that the night was passing away, and that his comrades were impatiently awaiting him.

Accordingly, after some more conversation of too general a character to merit being placed before the reader in detail, he excused himself to go.

"They knew his reasons, and made no effort to detain him."

Besides, they were aware how dangerous it would be for him to travel by daylight.

"If you will show me to the stables," he said, "I will depart. I would rather not attract the attention of your groom. I can saddle Black Bess myself."

"I will go with you," said Maud, rising.

"Nay, nay," cried Dick. "If you will call Shockley, that will do. Or, indeed, I could find my way there alone."

"You had better have a guide," said Blanche.

"I will lead the way," said Maud. "Black Bess has been solely under my care during her stay here."

"Then she has been well attended, I'll warrant. Lady, I am deeply grateful to you for your kindness to my steed; it touches me more closely than kindness to myself."

"You come with me, Blanche," said Maud.

"No, I dread the cold, and I have suffered so much illness lately, and I should be afraid of encountering the night air."

"I cannot suffer either of you to come," said Turpin. "Let me go alone."

"It is a consideration for your safety which causes me to refuse that request. I wish your departure to be as quiet and unnoticed as possible. Come with me. I will show you to the stable-door and also to the stall in which Black Bess is. Could you saddle her in the dark?"

"With ease. Besides it will not be dark; the moon is shining with so much brightness that it seems like day."

"Come, then."

Dick bade Blanche Winberry farewell.

Tears came to her eyes as she pronounced the word.

She forgot that it was a high-woman who stood before her.

His behaviour, from the first to the last, had been so noble, so generous, so self-sacrificing, that she could scarce believe that he was really what he was.

Indeed, on that night it is questionable whether she did not regard him with some stronger feeling even than admiration.

She felt that she was looking upon him for the last time.

Fain would she have put some question to him respect

ing her father, and the dark transactions in the house in Birdcage-walk, but her emotions so far overpowered her, as to deprive her of the faculty of speech.

Indeed, she found herself unable to articulate the word farewell.

Dick saw how much she was agitated, and hastened to withdraw.

The spectacle was painful for him.

Blanche made no opposition to Maud leaving with Dick. The errand seemed to her a perfectly reasonable one.

As soon as the door had closed behind them, she felt that she could no longer control her tears.

She buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

Poor girl! her sufferings were almost more than she could bear.

The effects of her grief were visible upon her countenance, and the black mourning-dress which she wore rendered her appearance even more ghastly.

In this state of grief, then, she remained, and while it continued she was quite oblivious of all else.

The duration of Maud's absence was, therefore, unnoticed by her, until, hearing a loud uproar at the back of the house, she started to her feet, and then she recollected all that had taken place.

"Where is Maud?" she asked. "Oh! heavens, what has happened?"

CHAPTER CCCLVII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD MEET WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE IN THE STABLE.

DICK TURPIN'S perceptions were not so obtuse as to prevent his perceiving that there was something peculiar in this behaviour of Maud Gouldman.

The reasons she had given for accompanying him to the stable appeared to be ridiculously insufficient.

But it was not likely that he would quarrel with them or make any remark upon the subject.

He was only too delighted at the idea of having her company for a few moments, and the privilege of bidding her farewell alone.

And Dick had determined to bid her farewell, although the love which filled his heart had increased rather than abated.

Let not this be wondered at, for there were few better qualified to command love from all hearts than she was.

Dick Turpin, however, in despite of this passion, overwhelming as it was, did not forget that rude sense of honour which had regulated his whole career.

He determined not to utter one word of love, but to bid her farewell, and then take every precaution not to see her again.

About, then, to take what he fully intended should be an eternal adieu, he rejoiced at the opportunity of doing so without having any eye to observe them.

But his heart fluttered when he asked himself the question, why had Maud been so eager to have no one present at the parting.

One or two things which had taken place had impressed Dick with the idea that the passion he experienced was reciprocated, and he fancied that, led away by a romantic affection, she might be tempted to say and do that which she would afterwards repent.

We need not remind the reader how rapidly a whole train of thought will pass through the mind, and Dick made these reflections during the brief interval which elapsed between his bidding farewell to Blanche and his passing out into the passage.

Maud closed the door behind her.

There was a lamp burning in the hall, and by the aid of this Dick saw the face and form of his companion.

He had always thought her incomparably beautiful, but never more so than at this moment.

There was a kind of bewitching confusion visible in her countenance and manner as she turned towards him.

She held down her head, and her eyes sought the ground.

Dick hesitated a moment, and then, encouraged by her manner, bowed politely and ventured to offer her his arm.

It was accepted, and with a readiness that betokened anything but displeasure.

How his heart thrilled, and how every nerve in his whole

body appeared to vibrate when he felt the pressure of her hand upon his arm!

Still, with her head down and silent, she walked with him along the hall in the direction of the door through which he had a short time before entered.

There was not a single person visible, nor did any sound arise to indicate the proximity of any one.

Indeed, the household at Winberry Hall had, since the death of Blanche's father, been much reduced, and those few servants who remained were at this moment in their own quarters in a distant portion of the building.

The whole place was, of course, familiar enough to Dick, and he opened the door with as much ease and readiness as his companion could have done who had lived there all her life.

Crossing the threshold, they passed into the yard.

It was then that Maud spoke for the first time.

She requested Dick to close the door after him.

He did this in a moment.

The moon, which, when he started from Enfield Chase, was only a short distance above the horizon, was now a little past the meridian, and as near the zenith as the moon ever is in England.

There was not a cloud nor even the thinnest vapour visible in the sky, which was of an intense and beautiful blue.

The stars shone, but their brightness was obscured, and in some cases extinguished, by the superior brilliancy of the queen of night.

There was no wind, and the most perfect silence prevailed, giving an air of delicious repose to everything.

It was a night that fully accorded with the feelings that held a place in the hearts both of Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman.

The yard was crossed in silence, and the range of buildings constituting the stables was reached.

Dick opened the door, and the pair entered.

The interior of the stable was very light.

In the roof several skylights were fixed, which, for the purposes of ventilation, were so constructed as to admit of their being raised or closed at pleasure.

Through these skylights the rays of the moon came with full force, and the place was almost as well illuminated as it was in the day time.

Maud Gouldman led the way to the stall in which Black Bess stood.

She knew it well, for she had made it a practice to feed her with her own hands.

It so happened that Turpin's mare stood exactly under one of these skylights, so that she could be seen with the greatest distinctness.

Dick was full of joy to see his bonny mare, to whose exertions on so many occasions he had owed his life, in such comfortable circumstances.

She was certainly in first-class condition, for everything in the shape of good feeding and grooming had been done.

Maud withdrew her hand, and Dick, with an impatience which he could neither control nor conceal, hastened up to the manger, and patted Black Bess upon the neck.

He spoke to her at the same moment.

Although so considerable a period had elapsed since he had seen her, the gallant creature recognised her master in a moment.

Uttering a joyful, half-neighing, half-whinnying sound, she turned round and responded to the caresses her master bestowed upon her by rubbing her head against his breast.

Had it been some dog who had for a length of time been separated from his master, he could scarcely have exhibited more joy than Black Bess did.

Again and again did Dick pat and caress her.

"You see she is quite safe," said Maud, perhaps with the intention of distracting Dick's attention from his steed to herself.

"Yes, thanks to your kindness and attention," replied Dick, turning round and taking hold of her hand, which he pressed warmly. "How shall I be able to repay you for it?"

"Nay, how shall Blanche and myself repay you for what you have done in our behalf? Do not for one moment imagine that we have forgotten how much we owe you; and that, if it had not been for you, the murder of Mr. Winberry would never have been discovered and brought home to the guilty parties. Oh! it was noble of

you—truly noble, to risk your life and liberty in the way you did for the sake of the orphan and of justice."

"Do not speak of that."

"Why not?"

"As I have said, I do not like to hear my own praises sounded."

"But I cannot refrain from expressing that admiration which such conduct as yours is so well qualified to call forth! Had I been told of such a thing, I should have discarded it as being beyond the bounds of belief."

"Well, well, say no more upon the point."

"Blanche feels her loss very, very keenly. She loved her father with all the affection of an only daughter. We, of course, expected you to make your appearance, and I know Blanche intended to ask you some questions respecting the last moments of her father; but I am afraid that her emotion was too great to allow her to do so."

"I could have told her very little, I fear; and certainly not more than I have related to you, and which I dare say you have repeated."

"I have, but then she would have felt a consolation in hearing only that much from your lips."

"Would I had been aware of it earlier, and then I would have approached the subject somehow; but, as it was, I was studious to avoid it, for I feared to hurt her feelings."

"I understand the motives which kept you silent. It is only natural that you should think any mention of the subject would be painful to her feelings. Again, however, let me express our heartfelt thanks for the service you have rendered us, and the admiration we feel for your noble-hearted conduct."

"Enough, enough. I shall be quite content if it will weigh against some of my other deeds."

"It will, it will; rest assured it will. But I will not detain you thus. I know every moment now is of the utmost importance to you. Look, here are the trappings belonging to your steed. I have had them placed here in anticipation of your visit."

She led the way to the stall adjoining the one in which Black Bess stood, and which was unoccupied.

In this were the articles of which she spoke.

Dick hastened to remove them, and in a few moments had his mare fully caparisoned, so that all he would have to do would be to mount.

He turned her head round towards the stable-door.

Then he paused.

The hour of parting had arrived.

It was at this moment that he fully realized how deep an impression Maud Gouldman had made upon his heart.

He was about to bid her farewell, and for ever.

He tried to command his voice to speak.

But in vain.

His throat swelled and ached so terribly that he found it impossible to articulate a word.

On her side, Maud seemed scarcely less affected.

The bright moonlight, as it shone down through the skylight upon the noble-looking forms of the highwayman and his steed, lent them a charm and an air of romance which, in daylight, they would not have possessed.

The idea uppermost in her mind was a fervent wish that Dick Turpin was anything but what he was.

She loved him; but she shrank from avowing, even to herself, that she loved a highwayman.

Observing his emotion, and guessing its cause, she hastened to speak, if only a word, so as to break the awkward and embarrassing silence which now prevailed.

The sooner the parting was over, she thought, the better, for she felt scarcely able to trust herself.

She held out her hand.

"Farewell!" she said, faintly, as she did so, "farewell! It may be that we shall never part again, and therefore you—you—"

She paused, and could go no further.

Her throat seemed to swell up and choke her.

"In all probability," said Dick, "we shall never meet again! Indeed, I shall studiously avoid a future meeting, for the sake of my own peace of mind."

He took her extended hand, which hitherto he had not ventured to do, and pressed it slightly.

"Lady," he continued, "for such is the title by which such a one as I should address you—lady, believe me, this is our last meeting, unless some unforeseen accident

should bring us face to face again. I shall try to avoid even the possibility of such an accident."

"Why?" asked Maud, in so faint a voice that none but the ear of a lover could have caught it.

"Do not ask me why, but believe that I have a good and sufficient reason for coming to such a determination."

"I cannot feel content with that," said Maud, "tell me what this reason is."

"Lady," said Dick, becoming, as he proceeded, more and more respectful, "it has been my good fortune to create in your mind a favourable impression concerning me—you have said as much, and I am bound to believe it; indeed, I would not doubt for worlds! But it is such a rare thing for anyone to hold me in esteem, and the knowledge that at least one person does so is so pleasant, that I should be loath indeed to say anything which would be calculated to reverse your good opinion."

"I am not afraid of your doing so," said Maud, huskily.

"Then do not ask me for my reason."

"You are unkind—unjust."

"I would not have you think me so for worlds."

"Then tell me."

"And lose your good opinion?"

"No, no; be under no apprehension upon that point, I beg you. I will give you my word that I will not allow anything you may say to prejudice me in your disfavour. Now tell me—surely you can do so after such an assurance as that."

"If I could be sure of not incurring your displeasure."

"You may be sure."

"Then, lady, I will tell you why I have resolved never to see you more, why I have determined that this shall be our last meeting. The resolution will be a hard one for me to keep. It is because I love you!"

It is impossible to describe the tone in which these words were uttered.

Maud was silent, and so was our hero, until at length the latter said—

"You see I have offended you. But no matter. It is, perhaps, my fate not to retain the good opinion of anyone. Farewell! farewell! I will leave you, and forget that you ever saw or knew Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

He tried to release her hand, but he found himself unable to extricate his own.

She pressed it with such tightness that he could not disengage it.

She came a step or two closer, and placed her other hand upon his breast.

"No," she said, "I am not offended; believe me, I am not. And so far from having lost my good opinion, I think a thousand times more highly of you now than I did before. Oh! I am carried away. I cannot express myself! I"—

Her head sunk upon Dick's shoulder.

But at this moment there was a rapid rush of feet, and a voice cried, in a loud tone—

"Dick Turpin, you are my prisoner! Surrender at once! Resistance is worse than useless! You are surrounded!"

CHAPTER CCCLVIII.

DICK TURPIN IS ATTACKED IN THE STABLE BY MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

So very suddenly and unexpectedly these words came upon Dick Turpin's ear, that for the space of about a moment he was rooted to the spot, unable to recover himself from his surprise.

Maud Gouldman uttered a piercing shriek, which plainly told how deep an interest he felt in the highwayman's safety, and clung to his arm with frantic tightness.

The voice which uttered the words with which the last chapter concluded was familiar to Dick, and he recognised it instantly.

It was the voice of Mr. Wiggles, the Bow-street police-officer.

But before we relate what ensued consequent upon this attack, we feel that it is due to the reader to explain to him how it was that Mr. Wiggles learned Dick Turpin's whereabouts, and how it was he broke in upon him at so unfortunate a moment.

In a former chapter we have stated that the police had made one or two appearances at Winberry Hall, and had searched the edifice from the roofs to the foundations, each time, of course, without receiving any recompense for their trouble.

They did not find what they sought.

Upon the last occasion, however, Mr. Wiggles, who was at the head of these little expeditions, went away far from satisfied.

Finding himself unsuccessful, and clinging to the idea that Turpin was at Winberry Hall, he resolved to change his tactics.

Hitherto, he had proceeded to the accomplishment of his design in what he considered to be a very open manner.

That did not succeed, so now stratagem and cunning must be tried.

Accordingly, he affected to withdraw all his men, and dropped some hints to the servants that he supposed he must give it up, and search elsewhere.

This he had no intention of doing.

Going to a short distance, he halted at a public-house with the intention of taking up his quarters there until he received some additional information.

As soon as night came, he called aside one of his men who, he judged, would be best able to carry out his instructions, and spoke to him in a low tone.

The police-officer fully understood what was required of him, and he set out at once, alone, in the direction of Winberry Hall.

He approached the place carefully, and spent the night in keeping watch round the premises.

But, as this was the night preceding Dick's arrival, of course he had all his trouble for nothing.

He returned to the public-house soon after daybreak the next morning, as Mr. Wiggles had instructed him to do, and there communicated his unsuccess.

Mr. Wiggles was almost ready to give the job up in despair, but in the end he resolved to have one more trial.

But it was not until late at night that he made up his mind—later, indeed, than on the preceding evening.

In consequence of this, it so happened that Dick arrived at the Hall before the officer, and was comfortably sitting down.

The officer, however, prowled round and round the premises, but without making any discovery.

At length, when his patience was all but exhausted, and he had come to the conclusion that it was "no go," his attention was attracted by the opening of the back door.

Keeping close in the shadow of the outbuildings, close to which he stood, he set himself to work to observe who came forth at that unusual hour.

The bright moonbeams enabled him to see with perfect distinctness two figures, male and female, emerge from the house and cross the yard.

He began now to have better hopes, but he had the prudence to remain quite still.

He watched the two figures, who, as the reader is aware, were no other than Dick and Maud, cross the yard in the direction of the stables.

But, whether they entered them, was more than he could perceive in his present position, and he was fearful of having been seen if he stepped out into the moonlight.

He waited a moment or two, therefore, and then the footsteps of those he had seen having ceased to be audible, he ventured to creep, with a stealthy tread, in their track.

Upon reaching the stables, there was no trace of them to be seen.

Where they had gone he was unable to determine.

He spent some little time in making a tour of the premises, and being still unable to see them, he came to the conclusion that they had not left.

Returning, he made a closer examination, and noticed something which had escaped his observation on the previous occasion.

The door leading into the stable was a little way open.

He approached with a silence that would have done credit to a Red Indian.

The murmur of voices struck upon his ear.

He listened intently.

At first he could only hear a confused murmuring sound, but, by degrees, he could distinguish several words, though he was not able to make connected sense of them.

One sentence, however, reached his ear in full, because it was spoken with greater loudness than the remainder of the conversation.

The voice that uttered it was a manly one, and the words of which it consisted were—

"Forget that you ever saw or knew Dick Turpin, the highwayman!"

The reader will remember that in the course of his conversation with Maud Gouldman, Dick Turpin uttered those words.

Stimulated by what he heard, the officer stretched his sense of hearing to the utmost.

He was afraid to believe in the reality of such good fortune as those words seemed to presage.

Could it be possible that the notorious highwayman was in the stable?

A few succeeding words convinced him that such was really the case.

No sooner had he come to this conclusion, than his movements became rather extraordinary.

Like a shadow he glided away from the stable-door.

He crossed the yard.

Then, standing in the shadow of a wall, he produced from his pocket a small round object, about four inches in length and one and a-half in diameter.

He next took from his pocket a long thin stick.

With as much haste as possible he tied the round object we have described to the end of this piece of stick, and then in a moment it became evident what it was.

It was a sky-rocket, though one of rather unusual size.

The officer stuck one end of this stick into the ground, taking care to give it a slanting direction.

Then, by means of what is called a thief's match, and which resembled in many particulars the lucifer now so common, he procured a light, which he applied to one end of the rocket.

With a rushing sound it sped into the air, leaving behind it a long stream of fire.

This was not seen so plainly as it would have been had the moon not shone so brightly.

However, it was plainly visible.

And now this rocket showed itself to be not one of the ordinary kind.

As the reader must know, these ascend until they have attained their greatest elevation, and then burst.

But this rocket, going high into the air, described a complete semicircle, leaving behind it a train of fire as it descended, just as it did when it rose.

Then, on reaching the ground, it exploded, doubtless with great violence and loudness, for where the officer stood he could faintly hear it, and it fell at the distance of nearly half a mile.

But the performance of this wonderful rocket was not yet over.

Upon exploding in the manner we have described, it did not go out, but burnt with a steady, bright blue flame.

This was the signal that Mr. Wiggles had devised, and a capital one it was.

It was an almost instantaneous means of letting him know what had taken place.

And, not only that, the officer who gave the signal would be able to keep his prey in sight, so that Mr. Wiggles would have no difficulty in getting upon their track.

With all these proceedings, however, Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman were entirely ignorant.

No thoughts of any such thing entered the minds of either.

The signal was, of course, seen by Mr. Wiggles and heard too.

He was on the look out for it, though he hardly dared hope to see it.

The horses were all standing in the stables adjoining the inn in a state of perfect readiness.

All their harness was on, and they were turned round with their heads to the stable-door.

The men were all armed, and ready to mount instantly.

Mr. Wiggles lost not a moment in telling them to do so; and, in a space of time which seemed miraculously small, the officers were all mounted and on their way at full gallop to Winberry Hall.

The officer who had given the signal perceived their approach.

They halted close to the Hall, and the greater part of them, by the order of their leader, immediately dismounted.

On tip-toe they approached the stable.

From what has just been narrated, it must be perfectly clear that the time which elapsed between the officer making the discovery that Dick Turpin was in the stable and the arrival of Mr. Wiggles with his band, was short indeed.

The exultation of the chief officer knew no bounds.

He could not subdue it.

At last, he thought, his prey was securely in his grasp, and that escape was utterly impossible.

Under the influence of this feeling, then, he had dashed open the stable-door and spoken the words with which the last chapter concluded.

Dick Turpin was more taken by surprise than ever he had been in his life.

The reason was simple.

His mind was intoxicated with love, and the manner in which Maud had spoken and acted were well qualified to produce such an effect.

She loved him.

Dick knew it, and his heart swelled when he became conscious of the knowledge.

Despite of his profession she loved him, and did not shrink from avowing her affection.

But he was soon aroused from such blissful dreams.

The piercing scream which burst from Maud's lips went as far towards recovering him as anything.

But she clung to him with terrified violence, nor could he disengage himself.

And she was deaf to his request to release him.

It seemed as though he was safer while she retained her hold upon him.

But that was an error attributable to the excitement of the moment.

It was fortunate for Dick that Black Bess was ready for the road.

His left hand grasped the bridle.

To his right arm and shoulder Maud clung.

"With you," she cried, "with you! Escape! escape! With you, with you!"

Dick understood her meaning.

There was no time to hesitate without he chose to yield himself a prisoner.

There was no time to urge those scruples which, at another period, he would have urged.

Besides which the voice of love, which is nearly always more powerful than that of the mind, influenced his conduct.

The officers, who surrounded the door in a dense mass, now began to show signs of making an attack, though it was clear they all shrunk from entering the stable and coming to a personal encounter with our hero.

"Surrender, Dick," cried Mr. Wiggles, who held a brace of loaded pistols in his hands. "You may as well give in quietly as not. What is the good of being wounded unnecessarily, and you can't escape! I will count three, and if you do not choose to give in by then we shall all fire, and the consequences will be upon your own head!"

To this long speech Dick Turpin paid no attention.

His whole thoughts were concentrated in what he was about.

With an easy exercise of his enormous strength, he took hold of Maud and lifted her into the fore part of the saddle, or, rather, on to the withers of his steed.

Then he mounted after her.

He passed his left hand round Maud's waist, thus sustaining her in her frail seat, and grasped the reins.

He plucked his right hand into his coat-pocket and drew forth a pistol.

Mr. Wiggles saw what Dick was about, and could hardly credit the evidence of his senses.

That he should even think of resisting seemed incredible.

Uttering a howl of rage, he commanded his men to follow him.

He rushed into the stable.

But before he could reach the stall in which Black Bess stood, Dick Turpin was firmly in the saddle.

Mr. Wiggles, however, darted forward, and caught hold of her bridle.

"Surrender!" he said; "surrender! or I will give my men the word to fire, and you will be blown to atoms!"

Dick's blood ran cold about his heart.

It was not, however, for himself that he cared, but for the fair creature in the saddle before him. Black Bess, who, from her long rest, was full of life and spirit, did not approve of Mr. Wiggles holding her by the bridle.

Suddenly, then, she lifted up her fore foot and kicked out with great force.

Mr. Wiggles uttered a dismal yell, and fell to the ground.

Black Bess's iron-bound hoof had come into violent contact with his leg, and, as he believed, had broken it.

At the same moment that this occurred Dick Turpin pressed his knees tightly against his mare's sides.

She needed no other impulse forward.

CHAPTER CCCLIX.

MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS PURSUE DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN ALONG THE WESTERN ROAD.

THERE was a rush as of a heavy body falling through space, a short, sharp neigh of satisfaction, and the rapid clatter of horses' hoofs.

Right gallantly did Black Bess obey the only impulse forward her master was in a position to give her.

Dick cheered her by uttering those words which, from experience, he knew to have an animating, exhilarating effect upon her, for he knew her work was far from being over.

A second did not elapse before he reached the stable-door, round which the police-officers, under the command of Mr. Wiggles, stood in a dense throng.

They made a kind of stand, or rather attempted to do so, when they saw Black Bess coming, with the intention of stopping her.

But it was vain to think they could oppose themselves to a body moving with such swiftness.

They gave way, and some were knocked down by the shoulder or legs of the gallant steed, and trampled under foot.

Those who were fortunate enough to be able to draw back with safety did so, and, taking a hasty aim at the flying figures, fired.

The report of so many pistols, fired, as we might say, all at once, was both startling and tremendous.

But it was not the explosion which gave Turpin any uneasiness.

He had felt the bullets sweep by, leaving him unhurt, but he shuddered as he thought that his fair companion might not have been so fortunate.

The shot which had passed him scathelessly might have injured her.

"Speak! speak!" he cried, in loud tones; "tell me that you are not hurt."

"I am not hurt," said Maud Gouldman.

When this little conversation had taken place, Black Bess had crossed the yard.

The officers were still at the stable-door, where a scene of indescribable confusion was taking place.

Dick pulled up.

He turned round so as to face his foes.

At that moment the door leading to Winberry Hall was thrown open, and Blanche, accompanied by a number of terrified domestics, made their appearance, in order to ascertain what was the occasion of the uproar.

They would have appeared sooner, only Blanche had previously given them all strict instructions to retire to rest; and, hearing such alarming sounds, she was afraid to venture forth unaccompanied by them.

What they saw astonished them not a little.

Clearly visible in the bright moonbeams, which seemed to shine upon him with particular effulgence, was Dick Turpin.

There, too, was bonny Black Bess, her sleek, ebony coat shining like velvet.

But, most astonishing of all, seated upon her back, her arms clinging round Dick, and his arms supporting her, was Maud Gouldman.

They could not believe their eyes at first, and when they were convinced that it was indeed no optical delusion, they were quite at a loss to think what conjuncture of circumstances had conspired to place her there.

The officers scrambled to their feet.

Mr. Wiggles was assisted to rise.

He limped to the door of the stable, and there standing only a few yards off was Dick Turpin.

Uttering an impotent curse, he yelled in tones loud enough to reach even the ears of our hero—

"Fire! fire, my men! Wing him if you can! Bring him down!"

An irregular volley followed this command.

But Dick was at a safe distance.

Seeing that the shots were ineffectual, Mr. Wiggles shouted—

"After him! after him! Mount, my men! We won't lose sight of him! We'll run him to earth! Oh! curses."

The last ejaculation was wrung from his lips by the pain which his leg gave him.

For the moment he forgot, in his excitement, the injuries he had received, and he attempted to run towards the horses.

But his recollection soon returned to him.

Dick Turpin had faith in the power of his mare.

That faith was the result of frequent trials.

With an air of the greatest coolness he raised his hat from his head, and bowed low in the saddle.

"Come on, gentlemen," he said, calmly. "It seems you are inclined to have a ride, and I am not in the humour to balk your inclination. Come on! we shall probably see some sport!"

These words aggravated the officers until they could scarcely bear themselves.

They made a frantic dash towards the spot where they had left the horses.

The officers who had charge of them now led them towards the stable.

Then ensued an immense scrambling into their saddles. Dick waited to see no more.

Replacing his hat upon his head, and grasping the reins more tightly in his left hand, he seated himself firmly in the saddle, and urged his mare forward.

Black Bess responded to the impulse freely.

She sprang onwards, at that long sweeping gallop for which she was so famous.

Without appearing to make any very great exertion, she flew over the ground with immense speed.

As he passed the corner of some outbuildings, however, a man sprang forward and strove to interrupt their progress by clutching Bess's bridle.

He did, indeed, seize it, but his grasp was only a temporary one.

Dick now held in his hand a strong riding whip, which he carried, not for the purpose of using it upon his steed, but as a weapon of defence when in close quarters.

In his saddle there was a little place made on purpose for the reception of it, and he had taken it out a moment before.

He had twined the thong round and round his hand, so as to have a strong hold of it.

The handle was loaded with lead, and it now swung in his hand like a bludgeon, or the modern life-preserver.

Swinging this round once, he brought it down with full force upon the officer's head.

An ominous crack was the result, and he fell down in the roadway, as if shot.

There was a rush, and he was far behind.

He had scarcely impeded our friend's progress at all.

Away, away they went.

The lane was reached—the open, broad high road was gained.

But the officers were now all mounted, and in full pursuit of the highwayman.

The hoofs of their horses made a terrible clatter on the stony road, for otherwise there was not a sound to break the silence.

From time to time a pistol was fired, but without any result.

Maud Gouldman had fainted.

Still she clung with great tightness to Dick's breast, while he supported her with his left arm.

And, as she leant back, there was but little difficulty in keeping her in her seat.

Away, away, then, with the velocity of a race-horse, went Black Bess—her hoofs striking fire upon the flinty ground beneath her feet.

Dick Turpin took the road leading into the open country.



[THE DYING POACHER REVEALS THE SECRET CAVE TO TOM KING AND HIS FRIENDS.]

To have gone towards London would have been madness.

He was careful, too, to take a road that led him away from Enfield Chase.

He was fearful of being seen to go in that direction, lest the suspicions of the officers should be aroused.

That was a safe refuge only while their presence in it was unknown and unsuspected.

Going, then, in a westerly direction, instead of an easterly one, which would have taken him to his destination, Dick rapidly left that and his pursuers behind.

The distance between both was increased every moment.

The police-officers, however, did all they could to keep up with the highwayman's matchless steed.

They lashed and spurred incessantly, and altogether behaved as though they had not the least regard for their own necks.

But though at the first Black Bess had shown herself insensible, or nearly so, to her double burden, she now gave indications of feeling it.

It was not so much the actual weight, but where that weight was placed.

It was too far forward for her to be able to use her fore legs with proper freedom.

Indeed, Maud was actually seated upon her withers. As much as possible Dick had striven to counteract this by leaning as far back in the saddle as he could.

To a certain extent he had succeeded in his object, but only partially.

Unwilling to distress the gallant animal, and satisfied by the start he already had of his pursuers, he reined her in.

He was the more inclined to do this, because he saw just a little way on before him a rather steep hill which they would have to climb.

A loud shout, like one of exultation, coming from the rear, told Dick that his pursuers had noticed the abatement of his speed.

He cared not for it.

Mr. Wiggles was almost frantic.

Such a chance of capturing the highwayman he felt sure he should never have again.

In spite of the pain he suffered—for his leg was almost broken by the kick Black Bess dealt it—he insisted upon being placed in the saddle.

Then he started in pursuit.

He urged on his men, and commanded them to urge on their steeds.

They did so.

They were animated, too, when they perceived, as they thought, that the highwayman's mare was flagging.

Every inch of ground they gained—thus lessening the distance between them—they felt fresh stimulus.

From time to time Dick looked back, to see what kind of progress they were making.

He saw they were rapidly approaching.

But he cared little for that.

He knew he could soon recover lost ground.

Slowly, then, he allowed Black Bess to make her way up the hill.

The officers did not draw in a bit.

But in spite of all their efforts they could not make their horses go up-hill at the same speed as they had gone over level ground.

When Turpin reached the top of the hill, they were rather more than half-way up.

He stood for a moment on the summit, and looked down upon them.

He did this with a double motive.

It was to keep an eye upon their motions, and at the same time to allow Black Bess a moment to recover her wind.

Soon the gallant creature clamped her bit, and showed herself impatient to be off.

It was time.

The officers had got much nearer, and Dick could hear them shouting something, but what the words were he could not make out.

Nor did he care much, for if he had heard them the chances are a thousand to one whether he would have paid any attention.

Suddenly, however, a shot was fired.

It did no damage, being merely a trial shot to ascertain whether they were within range.

But Turpin considered it was now high time to start.

Wheeling round, he again set his mare in motion.

There was a gradual descent from the top of this hill to the bottom, and down this they went like the wind.

Nor did the officers lag behind.

But what is that in the distance which gleams in the moonlight with a ghastly whiteness?

A second glance was enough to show Dick.

It was a toll-gate.

The road was wide, and the toll-house was built in the middle of it, with a gate on each side.

The whole seemed to have been freshly painted white.

It was this which made it so conspicuous, and caused Dick to see it so soon.

He drew in slightly.

A shout came from the rear.

It was one of triumph.

His capture was now considered certain.

It was not without some apprehension that Dick saw this obstruction in his path.

The gate was a high one.

The chance that it would be opened to allow him to pass through was a faint one.

Had he alone been upon the back of Black Bess he would have laughed at such an obstacle.

But now, with a double load, and after having made so much exertion, he felt somewhat apprehensive of the result.

And now the toll-man, aroused probably by the trampling and shouting, opened one of the windows in the toll-house and projected his head.

As soon as he saw this, Dick gave up all hopes of having the gate opened.

Black Bess must either leap it, or he must be captured. The former seemed impossible.

The gate, upon a nearer approach, seemed to be of an unusual height, and the top bar was garnished by a row of sharp iron spikes.

Shutting his teeth close, Dick kept on.

The officers shouted with gratification.

It was evident that, great as might be their opinion of the powers of Black Bess, they looked upon the feat of her leaping a toll-bar after such a long, fatiguing gallop as an impossibility.

"Hurrah!" shouted Mr. Wiggles, though the pain in his leg was almost more than he could endure. "Hurrah, my men! Forward—forward! We have him at last!"

CHAPTER CCCLX.

BLACK BESS CLEARS THE TOLL-GATE, TO THE CONSTERNATION OF MR. WRIGGLES AND HIS OFFICERS.

"HOORAY!" cried the toll-keeper, in a high, screaming, excited voice. "Hooray! This will do it!"

From an advantageous post—one of the upper windows in the wooden house—he was able to command a good view of all parties.

He knew in a moment what it meant.

It was not the first time he had witnessed a chase after a highwayman.

Thus, though Mr. Wiggles and his men shouted out at the top of their voices, he could not tell what they said—he knew a highwayman was on the road.

He, too, considered he was as good as captured, and it was under this impression that he gave vent to the triumphal ejaculations recorded above.

What he meant by the latter portion of his speech, when he intimated that something would do it, could very soon be seen.

He produced an enormous brass bell-mouthed blunderbuss—a species of firearm now obsolete, but at that time one upon which great reliance was placed.

The butt of this he placed to his shoulder, and the muzzle he pointed in the direction in which Turpin was coming.

"Pull up!" he screamed. "Pull up, or I'll fire and blow you to bits!"

Dick Turpin heard these words, and so did the officers.

Both looked towards the toll-house, and both, by the aid of the bright beams of the moon, saw the toll-man at the window with the blunderbuss in his hand.

The officers raised a shout of exultation when they saw this unexpected ally.

Dick's situation was now truly desperate.

He could hear the thundering hoofs of his pursuers.

Black Bess must leap the gate.

Steadily he led her to it.

He uncoiled the lash of the whip from round his hand, and grasped it firmly by the handle.

Then he smacked it twice.

The unexpected sounds made a marvellous impression upon his steed.

With three bounds she reached the gate.

Then, snorting loudly, she gave another bound, just as Turpin for the third time smacked his whip.

Up into the air rose the gallant creature, clearing the obstruction bravely.

She left full a foot to spare.

A cry of astonishment came from the lips of the toll-man when he witnessed this, as he, believed, impossible feat.

So surprised was he, that he forgot he held a blunderbuss in his hand, and, though his finger was on the trigger, he did not fire.

Black Bess reached the ground with a scarcely perceptible jar, and then bounded forwards at full speed.

Ejaculations of rage burst from the lips of the police-officers when they saw their prey again escape them, at the very moment when they believed they had him safely in their clutches.

A moment before, the advantage was all on their side, and now just the contrary was the case.

It was quite clear that not one of their horses was equal to the task of leaping the gate, and they wisely forebore to make even the attempt.

With a chorus of imprecations they drew up.

"Gate—gate!" they yelled. "Open the gate! Do quick! Open the gate!"

The toll-man had scarcely yet recovered from his surprise, and, in the confusion of the moment, he fired off the blunderbuss.

Luckily for the officers, it was not pointed towards them, or the consequences would have been serious.

As it was, there was a tremendous explosion, which seemed to shake the frail building to its foundations.

"Come down, you d—d fool," roared Mr. Wriggles, foaming with rage and impatience, for he knew what vast importance every moment was to him. "Why the devil couldn't you fire before, and do some good?"

"Who are you calling a d—d fool?" roared the toll-keeper, wrathfully. "Open the gate yourself, and be d—d to you!"

He slammed the window shut as he spoke.

Mr. Wriggles was convulsed with rage.

His countenance was contorted into all manner of shapes, and his mouth opened and shut like that of some huge fish gasping for air.

He was past swearing.

He took off his hat, and flung it with frantic vehemence upon the ground.

Then he caught hold of his hair, and tore it out by handfuls, each one of which he flung with the utmost fury into the road.

One of the officers, however, who happened to have his senses about him rather more than the rest, dismounted his steed, and, going to the gate, made an examination of its fastenings.

He found it was secured by a chain and padlock.

These obstructions he did not despair of overcoming.

Drawing a holster pistol from his pocket, he held the muzzle within an inch of the padlock and fired.

The effect of this was to shatter it completely.

"The gate is open!" cried this very clever officer, as he swung it back upon its hinges.

Without stopping to thank him, the whole of the troop dashed through, leaving him to mount his horse and follow in the best way he could.

Muttering curses at this treatment, for now his chance of obtaining the reward was considerably lessened, he turned round, but at that moment he found himself in the grasp of some one.

Turning round furiously, and inwardly rejoicing at having an object upon which he could vent his resentment, he found that his adversary was the toll-man.

"Hullo, my spark!" said the latter; "that's bow you does it, is it? Bless if that isn't a fine look-out! Do you think I am going to be bilked of the toll like that? And to break the lock, too! I'll lock you up till you make the damage good."

"Don't be a fool," said the officer, whose anger cooled as soon as he saw the toll-keeper was a stronger and bigger man than himself. "Don't you see that we are officers of police in pursuit of a highwayman? We were bound to get through the gate, or lose the reward. Why the devil didn't you fire that blunderbuss of yours a little sooner than you did? and then you would have come into your share."

"I was flabbergasted," said the toll-keeper; "I was flabbergasted; that's what I was!"

"Well, let me go; I shall never catch him if you don't."

"But who's to pay the toll?"

"Mr. Wriggles."

"Who's he?"

"One of the head runners at Bow-street."

Upon receipt of this intelligence, the irate toll-man released the police-officer, who made immediate use of his freedom to mount his horse.

But while this little altercation was taking place, his comrades had got almost out of sight.

As for Turpin, he was nowhere to be seen.

Leaving this unfortunate officer to follow his companions in the best way he is able, and to catch them if he can, we will take a glance at the proceedings of our hero.

After Black Bess had jumped the gate, he felt a sensation of almost perfect security.

He knew that none of their horses would be able to do what his had just done.

And he knew that there must of necessity be some delay while the gate was opened.

During that space of time he should be able to do wonders.

The unwonted sound of a smacking whip still rung in the ears of Black Bess, and she sped along the road at a kind of frightened gallop.

Dick let her have her head freely, and go at her own

A little exertion now would enable her to rest all the sooner.

Owing to the expedient of blowing the lock to pieces, which the officer had devised and adopted, the gate was got open much sooner than he expected.

The consequence of this was that the officers were in full pursuit of him before he had got quite such a good start as he intended to have.

Still the distance which intervened between them was considerable, for when the officers dashed through the gate in the tumultuous manner we have described, they could barely distinguish Turpin in the distance, though the road spread level and straight before them.

The horses had breathed a little during the altercation at the toll-gate, and they now set forward with renewed vigour.

The lash and spur were, however, liberally bestowed.

It soon became clear that Dick was gaining upon them. They were afraid at first to admit this, but the fact soon became so palpable that it was impossible it could be concealed.

Still they did not despair of achieving their aim ultimately, if they could only keep him in sight.

But this Dick determined should not be.

While he had such an advantage it was manifestly his best policy to improve upon it, and distance his foes completely.

In pursuance of this determination, then, he continued to urge Black Bess to make good speed.

Certainly that night she had achieved wonders, but she showed no signs of exhaustion.

Away, away they went—the hedgerows and trees seeming to flit by them with lightning speed.

Maud Gouldman recovered from her swoon—indeed she had never been utterly unconscious of what was taking place around her.

Still she was too much alarmed either to move or speak.

And as for Dick, his whole thoughts were absorbed by the danger of his situation.

He had taken an opportunity once or twice to speak to his fair burden, but as he failed in each case to extract any reply, he concluded that she was still unconscious.

Suddenly, however, Black Bess stumbled and almost fell.

She regained her feet, however, with a tremendous effort.

But she galloped no longer.

She limped a long, dead lame.

Full of despair and grief at this circumstance, and making no doubt now that he should be overpowered by his foes, Turpin forced her to come to a halt.

How terrible was his position now!

He dropped his whip, and wiped away the large beads of perspiration which had started forth upon his forehead.

"What is the matter? Why have you paused?" asked Maud faintly.

Dick dreaded to answer her.

"Wait," he said. "Sit still. I must dismount a moment."

"No, no."

"All will be well."

"No, too. I must dismount if you do."

She clung to him as she spoke.

"Come, then," said Dick, who not only felt unable to refuse her request, but also knew there was no time to be lost in argument.

He assisted her to the ground as he spoke, and then dismounted himself with a beating heart.

What could be the cause of his mare's lameness?

What was the result of it?

Those were questions that would intrude themselves upon his mind, and to which he could frame no reply.

Stooping down, he proceeded to make an examination of her hoof.

What words could express his relief when he found she had picked up a large flat pebble.

It fitted completely in the cavity of the hoof, and, by pressing upon the frog, was the immediate cause of the lameness.

No doubt the effect would cease when the cause was removed.

He hoped so, however.

Quick as thought he drew out his knife, and by means of that removed the stone.

So far as he could see the foot was unhurt. But, as he stooped down, his ears caught the dull beat of his pursuers' hoofs upon the hard roadway. He took advantage of the occasion to move the saddle further back.

Then, hastily mounting, he held out his arms, and his companion gave a spring and was placed in her former seat.

She was, however, more comfortable than before, and her weight was not so likely to interfere with Black Bess's movements.

Now came the anxious moment.

Was the mare lame or not.

Dick was almost afraid to make the trial.

He set her in motion, but with a beating heart and a mind full of apprehension.

To his unspeakable relief and joy, however, he found that she stepped freely, and that she had sustained no hurt.

Thankful for this narrow escape, he allowed the reins to fall upon her neck.

She responded to the signal by darting forward at something like her old swift gallop.

But, looking back, Dick could just discern in the distance the figures of his pursuers.

Whether they saw him he was too far to judge.

It might be so.

His heart was now comparatively light, for he did not doubt that he should soon recover the ground he had lost.

But now he had a fresh cause for solicitude.

The moon, which had given so much light, was now almost level with the horizon.

In a few minutes she would set.

By this Dick knew that dawn could not be far distant.

Indeed, as he turned back and looked towards the east, he could distinguish a faint leaden tinge creeping over that portion of the heavens, and which seemed to increase with terrible rapidity.

He felt anxious respecting his companions.

He knew they would expect him with the dawn, according to their agreement, and yet here it was at hand, and he nearly a day's journey from his destination.

He was increasing his distance from it, too, every moment.

CHAPTER CCCLXI.

DICK TURPIN PUTS UP AT THE "BULL AND GATE" INN, AND MEETS WITH A SLIGHT SURPRISE.

The moon sunk, and as soon as she disappeared below the horizon the dawn fairly came.

Over tree and bush stole the pale gray light, revealing all things through a kind of misty obscurity.

Again did Dick look behind him.

No trace of his pursuers could he see.

Nor did the least sound indicate their coming.

He had fairly distanced them, and he determined to quit the high road and make his way in a diagonal direction across the country, his intention being to reach Enfield Chase as soon as possible.

He would have turned towards it sooner only he did not want to lead his pursuers at all in that direction, and he resolved that should they by any means get upon his track, to immediately change his course, and not repair there until he was certain he could so in secrecy and safety.

As he expected, he had not far to go before he found one of those narrow lanes so common in England.

Down this he instantly turned, still hearing nothing of his foes, and leaving no trace by which they could follow him.

A lane better adapted for his purposes could not have been found.

It was serpentine to a degree, and on each side of it the hedgerows grew to a fabulous height.

These were, too, planted upon the top of high banks, so that as he sat in the saddle Dick could not see into the meadows.

This was a circumstance favourable in the extreme, for had the top of his hat been visible above the top of the hedge it might have been seen, but now all fear of such a thing as that was effectually precluded.

After a short time Dick slackened speed a little, but not much.

He was too near his enemies to feel comfortable.

The lane was of considerable length, and upon reaching its extremity Dick found that it debouched upon another high road similar to the one he had left.

The lane was continued on the opposite side, but deeming it now high time to change his direction, Dick turned to his right along this high road.

He imagined this must be the road back to London, and coming presently upon a milestone, he was confirmed in that idea.

This was a place quite unsuited to him, especially by daylight, so he took the next turning, still being careful to proceed towards his destination.

In this manner he travelled for full three hours, until, indeed, the day had really and truly begun, it being about eight o'clock.

He was now in quite a different part of the country.

He had neither heard nor seen anything of his foes since he turned down the first lane.

He could not conceive any means by which they could get upon his track again.

Under these circumstances of security, he made up his mind to halt at the first inn he came to, the exterior of which took his fancy.

He found, besides, that it would be impolitic to continue to travel to his destination by daylight; for, though it is true he met with few persons, yet they looked at him and his burden with great curiosity, which, in some cases, might have a dangerous result.

These thoughts were occupying his mind when he espied before him a place which he imagined would precisely answer his expectations.

It was a large, old-fashioned roadside hotel, standing back a long way from the road, with a tall sign-post near the footpath, and adjoining it a horse-trough.

Then, as for the house itself, it looked to be the very pink of cleanliness and order.

Dick had a great fancy for clean people.

He always fancied when he saw a house with clean windows and clean curtains—and, in fine, that an aspect of cleanliness overspread the whole building—that the inhabitants of such a house were kind-hearted and fit to be trusted.

Whether Dick was right or not we cannot say, but we do know that he had had a great deal of experience, and that ought to go for something.

Pleased, then, with the appearance of this roadside inn, the sign of which he saw was the "Bull and Gate," he rode up to the front door.

He dismounted before anyone appeared, and assisted Maud to dismount too, who never questioned him as to what he was about to do.

When he had done this, a stout, florid, middle-aged man, with a long pipe in his mouth, came to the door.

He looked at our travellers a moment, and Dick said—

"Have you any oyster on the premises? I suppose you have, as you advertise good accommodation for man and beast."

Dick pointed to the sign as he spoke.

"Aren't you seen Obi?"

"What Three-fingered Jack?"

"No, no! I mean our oyster. His name's Obadiah, only we call him Obi for shortness, you see."

"No, I haven't seen him."

"Oh! that boy, that boy! He'll drive me mad, I know he will. Now, sir, I am not afraid to say that he's fast asleep in the hay-loft this very minute. But, never mind, sir, I'll take your horse."

"And I will go with you," said Dick.

"I'll take care on him, sir."

"I don't doubt that, but I'll go with you all the same."

Then, turning to Maud, he added, in a whisper—

"We shall stop here a little while. Black Bess must rest. Go into the house. You will meet with every attention from the landlady, who doubtless will come forward to receive you. I shall not be a moment before I rejoin you. I am only going to see where my horse is placed."

Maud Gouldman inclined her head in token of assent, and entered the inn as she had been requested.

"Lead on," said Turpin, addressing the landlord, who looked all the surprise he felt at the appearance of his

visitors. "Lead on to the stables, and I will follow you."

He took hold of Black Bess by the bridle as he spoke, and the landlord at once started off in the direction of the stables.

Dick kept close at his heels.

"You wouldn't believe," said the landlord, "what trouble I have with that Obi. He's the *aggravated* lad that ever lived. I can't keep him awake. He sleeps all night and all day too, and there's no such thing as rousing him. I'll warrant we find him fast asleep in the hay-loft."

"Why do you keep him, then, if his services are of no little value?"

"Ah! there it is."

"Where?"

"Why, it isn't me at all, you see, but my wife."

"Oh! indeed?"

"You see, she has taken a kind of fancy to Obi, so its no good my complaining, or anyone else saying a word against the lad. She shuts her ears to it all."

"And what is the reason of her partiality?"

"Eh?"

"I say, why is Obi a favourite?"

"Ah! there you puzzle me completely. You see, women is such rum creatures. There's no accounting for them or their tastes."

"Very true."

"But here is the stable, sir. Just lead your horse in, for the place happens to be empty just at present; and then you come up into the loft, and there we shall find Obi, I will wager my life."

Dick led Black Bess over the threshold of the stable, and she walked into one of the stalls, and put her head in the manger in the most natural manner possible.

Almost before the landlord knew what he was about, Dick had divested his mare of the whole of her trappings, and put a halter over her head.

The saddle and bridle he hung on the end of the stall, in such a manner as to be readily taken hold of.

He requested the landlord to allow them to remain there, for he had officiously stepped forward, and was about to carry them off to the harness-room.

They now set off to find the ostler.

The landlord pointed to a ladder fixed perpendicularly against the wall, which led up into the loft, and commenced ascending it.

Dick followed him closely.

The loft overhead was profoundly dark, and Dick did not venture to stir from the top of the ladder until the landlord had removed the shutter which covered the circular aperture.

The place was then, comparatively speaking, well illuminated.

There was a plentiful supply of hay and straw in the loft, and, on going to one corner, there they found the ostler, snoring away as if for a wager.

Dick looked with some curiosity at this somnolent individual.

Imagine a lad about eighteen years of age, short, and so enormously fat as to make it a debatable matter whether he was not broader than he was long.

His clothes fitted him almost as tightly as his skin, and how he managed to get in and out of them seemed a mystery.

The seams, indeed, had burst in many places, leaving the stitches gapingly visible.

Such was the ostler of the "Bull and Gate," and the particular favourite of the landlady.

Dick Turpin regarded him for a minute or two in silence, and then the landlord said—

"What do you think of that, sir?"

"I am not at all surprised at his sleeping so much."

"No?"

"Not a bit."

"How is that?"

"Why, the fellow is so enormously fat that I don't suppose he could keep awake if his life depended upon it."

"I don't suppose he would."

"And you have tried to cure him?"

"Oh! yes."

"But failed?"

"As you see. I gave the job up in despair."

"Now I'll tell you how to cure him."

"How? Tell me, and I will thank you for ever."

"Oh! the means are very simple. I wonder the same thought has not struck you."

"What is it?"

"Starve him!"

"Starve him?"

"Yes. Don't let him have anything to eat for a week, and you will soon find a difference in him."

"Not give him anything to eat?"

"Nothing at all."

"Why, my wife would break her heart."

"Eh?"

"I say my wife would break her heart."

"What for?"

"If he had nothing to eat. Why, she is always fretting about him, and feeding him when he happens to be awake. She says she is sure the poor fellow can't have half enough to eat."

"Ha! ha!"

"You laugh."

"I do, my friend. I can't help it. You may depend you will have to put up with your sleepy ostler, or else get rid of him altogether."

"Oh! that's quite out of the question."

"Is it?"

"Yes; my wife would never submit to that, I feel confident."

"Ah! well, it can't be helped then. Wake him up."

"I will, sir. But he do sleep uncommonly sound."

"He appears to do so."

The landlord was doubtless experienced in waking Obi, for he stooped down and caught hold of his ear with so much violence that Dick thought he would surely have pulled it off.

It had the desired effect of arousing him.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked about him with a stupid, silly expression.

But when Dick saw he had fairly got his eyes open, he took half-a-crown from his pocket, and said—

"Look here, Obi. Here's half-a-crown waiting to go into your pocket, if you will just rub a horse down with a wisp of straw."

These words had an astonishing effect.

The ostler sprang up, and sleep seemed to fly from his eyelids at once.

"Come on," said Dick. "I'll show you the horse."

Obi manifested every desire to follow him, so Dick descended the ladder.

In another moment all three stood in the stable.

Obi set about his work with right good will, and in a manner that showed he was well aware of what he was about.

But half-a-crown was a stimulant he rarely met with.

Dick stood by according to custom, and saw his mare properly attended to, for he knew by experience that ostlers were not to be trusted.

This done, he fed her himself, and then put the promised guerdon into Obi's hand.

His dull eyes sparkled when he felt the contact of the precious metal, and he consigned the coin to his pocket with an air of the greatest satisfaction.

Dick could not help being much amused by this ludicrous incident of the fat ostler, and as he walked towards the house he felt no small degree of curiosity to see the landlady who had made choice of such an extraordinary pet.

It might be that Dick surmised the occasion of her partiality, but if he did he made no remark to the landlord concerning it.

Upon entering the inn, the first person he saw was the landlady.

He was a little surprised at her appearance.

She was exactly the reverse of the ostler.

She was very tall, and very, very thin. Indeed, she would have done well to personate the character of a living skeleton.

There seemed to be scarcely an ounce of flesh on her bones.

She had, too, rather a vinegar-looking expression of countenance, and she looked at Dick closely and suspiciously.

He, however, looked at her with a smile upon his countenance.

He was thinking of the fat, sleepy ostler, and contrasting the two with each other.

He inquired after Maud, and was told that she was in a private room, awaiting his arrival.

The door was pointed out to Dick, who made his way with rather a slow step towards it.

CHAPTER CCLXII.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN AT LENGTH COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH EACH OTHER.

FOR the first time since his interview with Maud in the stable, Dick Turpin began to have a little reflection.

So many incidents had taken place of the most startling character, and they had succeeded each other with so much rapidity, that he had really neither opportunity nor leisure for cool thought.

Now, however, his recollections almost overpowered him.

It was in consequence of this, then, that he walked so slowly towards the door of the room in which Maud was awaiting him.

When he reached its threshold, he hesitated and faltered.

"I have acted like a villain," he muttered; "like a base villain! I see it now while I am in my cool blood, but I did not then. My brain was in a whirl. I love her! I feel that I love her, and, unfortunately for her, she seems to love me too! But I ought not to have taken advantage of her passion in the way I have done. I ought to have resisted all her entreaties. It is too late now, however. No, not too late. It is not too late yet to make reparation for the fault I have committed. I will do so though I break my heart! I will do so! I am resolved!"

Having come to this determination, Dick Turpin, still repeating the words, "I am resolved," entered the apartment.

He found Maud seated near the fire in a pensive attitude.

But upon seeing him enter, she rose and came towards him with a smile.

With the quickness of a woman's apprehension, she saw, however, that some change had taken place.

She drew back suddenly, and then looked at him with a wondering expression.

Dick had composed his face into a stern regard.

He felt that he had a difficult part to go through, and one that would require all his fortitude and self-command to sustain.

He tried to speak.

But his voice failed him.

"What has happened?" asked Maud, at length. "Something terrible has taken place. Tell me what it is. Let me know the worst at once. I can bear anything better than suspense."

"I will tell you," said Dick, huskily. "Sit down a moment."

He placed a chair as he spoke.

"And you sit down too."

"No, I will stand."

Maud turned pale, and looked up into his face.

This total change of manner alarmed her. She had never seen Turpin under such an aspect before.

She was at a loss to think what it could portend.

The prominent idea in her mind was that he had found himself menaced by some fresh and terrible danger.

Anxiously and suspensively, therefore, she looked up into his countenance, eager to catch the first words that should fall from his lips.

"Lady," said our hero, "you see before you one who has, for the first time in his life, acted a villain's part."

"How? I do not understand you."

"I will explain, and endeavour to make my meaning clear. To begin, I love you! I am not ashamed to make the confession. I love you! How much it would be hard for me to say. Our meeting was a strange one, and the events which afterwards occurred were much stranger still. The tendency of all was the same. It was to bring me into closer connection with you; and the result of this was the love of which I speak, and which I found totally beyond the power of my control!"

"But I"—began Maud Gouldman.

"Pardon me," said Dick, interrupting her. "Hear me

out. I beg that you will do me the favour to listen to all that I have to say. You know what I am. I am a highwayman, a violator of the public peace, a law-breaker, a fugitive from justice, a criminal so far as committing robberies is concerned. For me to raise my eyes towards you was wrong—wrong in the extreme. But I did so. For me, however, to love something, all beauty, all goodness, all purity of heart, was nothing surprising. Who could remain insensible to such attractions? Presently, however, as time passed on, though I religiously forbore to allow the faintest trace of my passion to be visible, several little things occurred which generated a suspicion in my breast that you have conceived a similar passion to myself. At first I refused to give credit to the evidence before me, but soon I had proof. I regretted this, but still I thought the feeling was nothing more than gratitude inspired by those services which it was my good fortune to be in a position to render you."

"One word," said Maud. "Let me speak one word."

"Nay, listen. I have but little more to say. Although my own love for you was so great, I made up my mind never to avow it. It would have been folly and presumption for me to have done so. I determined, then, to see you once more—to to bid you a farewell which I intended to be an eternal one, and, having parted from you, to have adopted such precautions as would have prevented the possibility of a future meeting."

"There is a gulf between us, so wide and so deep that to cross it would be impossible. I came—I saw you. I looked, as I thought, for the last time upon your countenance. But I was weak. I ought to have resisted the temptation of bidding you adieu alone. However, I did not. And here let me frame the only possible excuse I can for the base blackness of my conduct. In our conversation we were surprised by the sudden appearance of the police-officers. From that moment all was confusion, and that confusion has continued until this moment, and now you are here with me."

"I am here," said Maud, quietly, "and of my own free will. You have suspected my love. It overmasters every other feeling. I know what you are. You have never disguised yourself, and I am willing to dare all and share all with you."

When he heard these words, Dick's first impulse was to spring forward and clasp the lovely girl to his heart.

But a second thought enabled him to restrain the impulse.

His countenance assumed a more mournful expression.

"Alas! alas!" he said.

"Why do you say alas?"

"Because I regret to hear what I have just heard. Oh! lady, I pray you pause. Pause and reflect. Pause, ere it be too late. We were never intended for each other. You know not what I am—you know not the nature of my life."

"I care not," said Maud. "I love you. Fervently, indeed, do I wish that you were anything but what you are. That, however, is useless. The past cannot be recalled."

"It can be forgotten."

"By some."

"Let it be by you; forget that you ever saw me."

"No, no. That would be impossible. I have seen you under many aspects. In the hour of danger I have seen you cool, collected, and daring. I have witnessed your courage, your devotion, your singleness of heart—in fact, all those qualities which call forth admiration. What am I? An orphan—a dependant on the bounty of another."

"Do not depreciate yourself," said Dick. "I know too well the whole circumstances of your life. You are as far above me in station as you are in virtue and innocence. Lady, I pray you, forget this mad infatuation. Forget, as I before asked you, that Dick Turpin ever had existence."

"Never! never!"

"Oh! you wound me to the heart."

"Will you listen to me?"

"I am bound to do so."

"But I mean, will you pay attention to what I say, and believe that I am in earnest and sincere in all I say?"

"I cannot refuse you."

"Well, then, let me tell you that I have well weighed the consequences of the step I have taken. I knew you loved me—I was quite sure of it: a thousand things have occurred to place it beyond all doubt. For my own part

I loved you. At first I fought against the feeling, and strove to subdue it. In vain. The more I tried the stronger did my love become. I then relinquished the struggle; I relied upon your love. I had the vanity to feel that I could do so with security. I devised our parting. You saw it. Then came the hour of danger. What I felt I cannot describe. I had but one idea, and that was that I must be with you. Need I say more? I am here."

Dick Turpin listened to these words with mingled emotions.

He saw before him a girl—young, inexperienced, and enthusiastic. He saw her carried away by the violence of a romantic passion. What should he do?

The position was a trying one.

Had he been heart-whole, this case would have been simple.

Now it was complicated by the love he felt for her.

It required something more than human strength to be proof against the temptation.

Who could renounce the proffered love of one who was adored with all the ardour of a first affection?

To the justice of our hero be it said, he made the attempt.

It is probable that, under no other circumstances than those which actually occurred, would Maud Gouldman have left Winberry Hall under his protection.

Now, however, he felt that fatal step had been taken—that her reputation would be sullied—that for her to return would be impossible.

Torn and distracted by contending feelings, he endeavoured to address her.

"You tell me you have duly considered the step you have taken: let me hope for your own dear sake that you have done so. Oh! Maud, dearest," he exclaimed, taking her hand and passionately pressing it, "I love you a thousand times more than life itself. I would not have you share the dangers and hardships of such a life as mine for worlds; such a fate would be too horrible. Hitherto, you have seen but one scene in my life. I am a fugitive. I am allowed no rest—I am hunted from one place to another by the minions of the law. It is as much as ever I can bear; but what would become of you? Oh! my heart bleeds when I think of what I have done! It would have been better a thousand times that I had suffered the officers to slay me than have fled, taking you with me. But, alas! my love blinded me, and I have done you an injury which I cannot repair."

"I cannot allow you to accuse yourself of that. Whatever injury I may have sustained has been of my own bringing on, and I alone ought to be the sufferer. Listen to me. So far from regretting the step I have taken, I should do the same thing again."

"Impossible!"

"I am speaking of myself. And now I have another word to say, for I hope we shall never need another such an interview of explanations. Much as I loved you, I did not leave my home with the intention of becoming a highwayman's bride. No; I saw that you were qualified for better things, and trusted I had the power to reclaim you. You have spoken of your mode of life—its perils and inconveniences. But you spoke as though they must endure for ever. Why not quit this dangerous course? You are young, and there is time to repent."

"Alas!"

"Again that word."

"I regret that you could have set out with an idea so chimerical. You do not know that in England, if a man once transgresses the laws, he is an outcast from society. He can never enter it again. It is so with me. Dick Turpin has for so long been a highwayman that the world would not allow him to be anything else. You must dismiss that as a vision."

"I cannot, and I will not," said Maud, with energy. "It is a thousand pities that one so gifted by nature as you should so abuse those gifts. But we will quit the theme. Farewell!"

She rose abruptly as she spoke.

"Farewell!" repeated Turpin, in astonishment.

"Yes, farewell. Mine is a wretched lot. I thought you loved me—could have laid my life of it. For your sake I have left home and all that I hold dear, and even you spurn me from you."

She burst into a passionate flood of tears as she spoke.

The sight of those tears at once drove away all Turpin's hesitation.

He wavered in his strong purpose.

Springing towards her, he clasped her by the hands, and in a voice broken by emotion said—

"Oh! Maud, Maud. You know not how false are the words you have just uttered. I do love you, and it is because I do love you that I am acting as I now am. Believe me, a time will come when, looking back upon this scene, you will rejoice that—that—"

"Never," said Maud, through her tears. "I comprehend your conduct. I know its motives. I comprehended all from the first. I love you for it all the more. In your single-heartedness you would not hesitate to sacrifice all that you hold dear. But could I be happy in knowing your despair? No. You have acknowledged, have you not, that I have already committed myself in the eyes of the world?"

"Is it not so?"

"I care not if it is. I rejoice that I have done so. I cannot return. That is impossible. Tell me, then, which you will do. You have the choice of two alternatives."

"What are they?"

"You must either leave me friendless, alone, and unprotected upon the wide world, or take me with you."

"Fain would I be spared either."

"I know the feeling which prompts you to make that remark. But I am here. To return is impossible. I would die rather. We love each other. The fact cannot and need not be disguised. Why, then, should we make ourselves wretched when happiness is within our reach? I have told you that I am ready and willing to share your lot, whatever it may be; still it will be with a hope of bringing you to better things. Choose, then, between our mutual happiness or our mutual despair. The fate of both of us is in your hands!"

Turpin was silent.

He saw too well the position of the young girl before him, and yet he dreaded to allow himself to be convinced by her reasoning.

He hesitated, and Maud observed.

Gently she approached him, and, stealing her arms round his neck, laid her face against his breast.

She conquered!

CHAPTER CCCLXIII.

DICK TURPIN'S THREE COMRADES HAVE A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE IN ENFIELD CHASE, AND MAKE AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

HAVING traced thus far the proceedings of Dick Turpin and his fair companion, we must request the reader to direct his attention to Enfield Chase, where, during Turpin's absence, events of the greatest interest have been taking place.

It will be recollected that the last we saw of Dick's three faithful comrades was when they had bid him farewell upon the outskirts of the forest.

They stood for some time after his departure without moving or speaking.

They listened to the sound of his progress through the wood.

But gradually those sounds became inaudible, and then, turning round, they took their way to the inmost recesses of the wood, to spend the time in the best manner they were able until their comrade should return.

They felt a considerable amount of uneasiness respecting him, for they knew the enterprize was a dangerous one.

Yet, such was the dread that they all had of inaction, and such was the desperation they felt for danger, that they all coveted the undertaking.

"This is awful dull work," said Claude Duval, as they walked down a broad glade in the forest. "Here we have told over all our exploits, and have got nothing left to talk about."

"It is dull work," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I am in hopes it won't continue long."

"If I thought it would," exclaimed Claude Duval, "I would be off this moment."

"Fair and softly," said Tom King. "We are safe."

"A fig for safety."

"That's all very well; but you were one of the first to be in favour of a rest."

"I know that."

"And now you are the first to get tired of it."

"I can't help that. Here we are cooped up in this wilderness of a place, with nothing to do and no chance of meeting with an adventure."

"I'll tell you what you shall do, Claude."

"What?"

"Tell us the story of your life. You have promised to do so many a time, and where would you find a better opportunity than the present?"

"Capital. That will pass the time away better than anything else. Come on, Claude. We will go back to our old quarters, and then, Claude, you must begin."

"Well, I don't mind."

"Come on, then."

Having made up their minds to do something, our friends felt more at ease, and strode with a more rapid step.

They had made up their minds, in order to diminish the chances of discovery, to get always as far as possible into the heart of the chase, and it was towards this spot that they now made their way.

The little dell, or dingle, so full of natural beauties, where they had first halted, was where they had fixed upon.

They had not been tempted to stray far from that lovely spot.

It was sheltered and retired.

A rather long walk brought them to it.

But at length they arrived.

The moon was shining brightly, so they were able to find their path with the greatest ease.

Seating themselves near the root of a gigantic tree, they all prepared to listen to the story of Claude's early adventures, of which they were perfectly in ignorance.

Claude seemed to gather his thoughts and recollections together for a moment, and then he said—

"If I am to begin with the beginning, I promise you I shall have rather a long story to tell."

"So much the better. We shall have plenty of time to listen to you between now and daybreak."

"So you will."

"Begin at the beginning, then."

"Very good. My parents, then" —

"Go on. Why do you pause?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"But I did."

"Nonsense. Go on with your story, and don't keep us in suspense."

"I tell you I heard something."

"What was it like?"

"I can hardly tell you. Listen a moment, we may perhaps hear it again. I am certain I was not mistaken."

All now listened attentively, for, situated as they were, it behooved them to pay attention to all sounds of an unusual character.

For some moments all was still.

The trees rustled slightly as their topmost branches swayed to and fro in the night wind, but that was all.

Claude himself began to fancy that his ears had deceived him, and was about to say as much, when all three were startled by a repetition of the sound he had before heard.

It was a low, faint, moaning cry, as of some living creature in great pain.

There was no mistaking the sound, nor the character of it, and our friends sprang to their feet.

There seemed a chance of an adventure.

Although they had heard the sound, they were unable to say with precision from which direction it proceeded.

Before they ventured to move then, they listened for a repetition of it, in order to have some guide for their footsteps.

They had not long to wait.

The sound came again.

But this time with much greater distinctness than before.

Having listened for the express purpose of ascertaining the direction from which the sound had come, and being in anticipation of hearing it, they were now all three in a position to say which course they ought to take.

Without uttering a word further, Claude Duval sprang forward, and the others immediately followed him.

Regardless altogether of the various obstacles in his way, Claude strode on in a straight line for the point he wished to reach.

But, having gone for some considerable distance without meeting with anything to reward their search, and without hearing another ery confirmatory of the previous ones, they paused and once more listened.

As they did so, they naturally looked around them.

They then noticed, for the first time, that they were in a portion of the forest which they did not recognize as having seen before.

It had a much wilder look than the part they had frequented.

The trees were larger and grew closer to each other, so that their branches, intermingling above, made one huge canopy, through the interstices of which the moon's rays streamed with a remarkably beautiful effect.

The undergrowth, too, was much more luxuriant and of a more impenetrable character.

At every step they took they experienced a constantly increasing difficulty in forcing their way.

The scene itself was, however, grandly and sublimely beautiful.

But, although they looked around them and noted the different peculiarities of the landscape we have mentioned, they did not bestow much attention upon it.

They were occupied with the mysterious sound which had interrupted the tale Claude was about to tell, and longing to hear it once more.

They were not kept much longer in suspense.

The sound came again.

But this time, although they were quite certain in their own minds that they had drawn considerably nearer to the spot from which it emanated, it was much more feeble than on the preceding occasions.

It had, too, a more wailing and mournful character.

Evidently, however, our friends had some distance further to go before they would be able to clear up the mystery.

But they did not care much for that.

Noting the direction from which it came, they struggled through the underwood with the best speed they were able to make.

At every step they took the scenery grew wilder and wilder, while the ground rose into deceptive mounds, or sank into treacherous hollows, thus making their route very difficult and perplexing.

But, in the pursuit of any important object, all minor inconveniences are disregarded; and so the three highwaymen did not heed those obstacles from which, under ordinary circumstances, they would have felt inclined to shrink.

For some considerable time the ground had had an upward tendency, though the rise was so gradual that it was some time before they noticed it.

Now the ascent became abrupt.

After proceeding thus for a little more than a hundred yards, they came to a sudden halt.

It was Claude who stopped first, and he called out to his companions to follow his example.

They did so at once, and without hesitation.

To their unbounded astonishment, they found themselves upon the brink of a tremendous precipice.

Had they incautiously advanced a couple of steps further, they must have fallen headlong into the abyss and perished.

It was a wonder and a mercy that Claude saw the danger when he did, for the brink of the precipice was overgrown with shrubs and underwood, which would have almost allured anyone to destruction.

Moreover, the sides of the precipice, in some places, formed a roothold for trees.

The danger of this spot at once ceased when its nature was known.

Cautiously, then, our three friends approached the verge of the precipice.

By the aid of the moon, shining as she was in a perfectly unclouded sky, they were able to see about them with great ease and distinctness.

As nearly as they could estimate, the precipice was about a hundred feet in depth.

But in their position it was difficult for them to form any accurate idea of distance.

Below them was a small open space, upon which



[THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN KIDNAP THE PARSON.]

nothing grew, owing probably to the rocky nature of the soil.

Beyond that the forest stretched as far as the eye could reach, and from their elevated position they commanded a tolerably extensive prospect.

Nothing was visible but tree-tops.

The precipice consisted of an almost perpendicular wall of rock.

Its colour was white, and it glistened strangely as the moon's rays poured upon it.

But, on looking down at the ground beneath, the whole attention of our friends was immediately absorbed by perceiving the dim outline of a shadowy-looking figure.

As they gazed their ears were assailed by the same strange cry.

There was no doubt that it ascended from the ground below, and from whence could it proceed save from the shadowy figure which they could just faintly distinguish?

There was nothing else to be seen from which such a cry could come.

More intently, then, they gazed down upon it, and strained their eyes in a vain endeavour to make out what it was.

But the distance was too great, and the light not sufficient, to enable them to do this.

It might be a human form—indeed, it looked more like one than aught else.

But the cry which they had heard?

Was that human?

Their curiosity was stimulated to the utmost degree by these questions, which naturally suggested themselves to their minds.

With one accord, they looked around them at the nature of the place upon which they stood, to ascertain what means there was of reaching the ground below.

It seemed clear they would have to make a considerable detour in order to do this.

While they were thus engaged, they again heard the meaning sound, and this time they fancied they could faintly distinguish a word.

And that word was help.

But it might be fancy only; for they were by no means certain that the form beneath them was a human one.

"We must descend somehow or other," said Tom King. "Surely there must be a means of doing so; and if it is, as I suspect, a fellow-creature lying at the base of these rocks, we ought to lose no time in rendering such assistance as lies in our power."

"Certainly—certainly!" cried his comrades.

"Follow me, then, and we will try if we cannot find some means of descending to the foot of this rock."

As Tom King spoke he led the way along the top of the precipice.

His companions followed closely in his footsteps.

The rock seemed to extend as far as they could see both to the left and right of them, and varied but little in its average height.

They had no resource but to follow along this, for it was quite impossible for them to lower themselves down the side of the abyss.

Presently, however, they noticed that the depth to the ground below materially and rapidly diminished.

This was caused not by the ground they were upon trending downwards, but by that below rising upwards.

In a little while, no doubt, all became of one uniform, unbroken level.

But they did not go far enough to ascertain this.

As soon as the depth of the abyss had decreased sufficiently for them to lower themselves with safety, they did so.

Upon feeling their feet touch the ground, they hastened along, keeping close to the face of the rock.

But now they had changed their position, the general aspect of the place was, of course, changed also, and they were unable to recognise the spot where they had seen the figure lying.

CHAPTER CCCLXIV.

THE DYING POACHER TELLS THE STORY OF HIS LIFE, AND REVEALS TO OUR FRIENDS THE SECRET CAVE AMONG THE ROCKS.

In this dilemma, then, they paused, after having gone, as they imagined, far enough to reach the desired spot.

But they could see nothing lying at the base of the rocks.

This was annoying.

They had, however, no resource but to remain profoundly still, and await a repetition of the cry.

But none came.

Puzzled and perplexed, the three highwaymen, after having waited for a considerable time in vain, set forward, under the impression that they had not gone far enough to reach the object of their search.

But every now and then they would pause and listen.

In this manner they went a long distance—so far that all three unanimously agreed they must have passed the spot where the figure had been lying.

Under this impression they retraced their steps.

Scarcely had they turned than the morning sound came upon their ears.

It was somewhere close at hand, and they at once proceeded in the direction from which it appeared to come.

They were now more fortunate than they had been.

Lying close to the trunk of a huge tree, which was situated about twenty yards from the face of the rock, was a man.

There could be no mistake about the matter, for through an opening in the trees came a bright ray of light, which revealed him fully.

In all probability it was from the lips of this man that the startling cry had come.

His dress was that of a common labouring peasant. Indeed, he seemed to be nothing more than a farm-labourer.

He was quite motionless, and lay with his face upturned.

The moon's rays fell upon it with full force.

It was furrowed and swarthy, and the lower part of it was buried in a beard—rough, shaggy, and of many days' growth.

Our friends were not a little surprised to see this man. He was the first they had seen since they had been in the chase, and they imagined they had the place entirely to themselves.

Now it became clear that this was a mistaken notion.

Upon a closer approach, this man presented every appearance of death, with which all three of the highwaymen were familiar.

For some moments they stood gazing upon him in silence, until, at length, they were startled by a faint moan, which came from the lips of the apparently dead man.

Its character was precisely similar to the sounds which they had previously heard, and which had so much attracted their attention and curiosity.

"He is not dead," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack. "Poor fellow! I wonder who he is? But never mind, let him be who he may, he shall not perish if I will revive him. I have nothing better to offer."

As he spoke, Sixteen-String Jack produced a small flask of brandy of the strongest quality.

He always made a rule of carrying this with him, not for the purpose of drinking it, but in order to have a stimulant should any accident happen to make one necessary.

He pulled out the cork, and requested Claude to raise up his head a little while he poured some of the spirit down his throat.

This Claude set about doing; but, upon nearing the prostrate man, he saw him show symptoms of reviving, and endeavour to commence a struggle with him.

He evidently feared him as an enemy.

But, taking no notice of this, Claude raised his head as his companion had requested.

Jack now approached, and, in spite of the feeble resistance the man made, poured a good drop of the brandy down his throat.

A violent spasm now convulsed his frame, but it quickly passed away, and then the man, opening his eyes, glared wildly around him.

He saw our friends in a moment, and, under the impression that they must be enemies, tried to rise to his feet, and either escape or attack them.

But his strength was insufficient for this, he sank back again.

Jack made a sign to Claude that he wished to renew the application of the brandy.

Again Claude raised his head, and again Jack poured a quantity of spirit down his throat.

This time the man was conscious of what was taking place, for he made no struggle as he did on the former occasion.

He swallowed the brandy, but with great difficulty, and then he said, in a faint voice:

"Spare your trouble, spare your trouble. You need not take me prisoner. There is not half-an-hour's life in me! I can feel that. So let me lie where I am, and die under the shade of the old trees!"

The highwaymen were at first not a little surprised at the style of this address, but they soon understood how it was.

The dying man—for such he had proclaimed himself, and such he appeared to be—mistook them for his foes.

But Tom King soon spoke, and tried to remove this erroneous impression.

"You are labouring under some mistake," he said. "We are no enemies of yours, and are even inclined, let you be who you may, to be your friends. Look at us, and be undeceived. We heard your cries from a distance, and with some difficulty have traced you to this spot."

It was evident these words reached the senses of the man, for, making a great effort, he raised himself upon one arm, and looked about him. The forms of the highwaymen were clearly enough visible in the moonbeams.

But he passed his hands over his eyes, as though his sight was dim and he wished to clear it.

"No—no," he said. "You do not wear the garb of keepers. I can see that, now, although my sight is going fast."

At hearing these words, the three friends exchanged significant glances.

"Can we do anything for you?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "If so, do not be afraid to speak."

"No—no," replied the man. "You can do nothing for me, but leave me here to die."

He sank back again upon the ground as he spoke.

"Speak to us," said Claude. "We have heard in the silence of the night strange and unearthly cries. Did they proceed from your lips?"

"They did."

"And, as we stood upon the top of the rocks, yonder, was it you we saw lying down at the base of them?"

"It was."

"And you crawled here?"

"Yes."

"But—pardon me—how comes it that you are here alone, and, as you say, dying? You can speak to us in all confidence, and rely upon our doing no harm to you."

"I will tell you," said the man. "I will tell you."

He again, and apparently with great pain, raised himself up upon one arm.

"I will tell you what has brought me into this plight. You see me now—you see what I am. Look upon me, for in me you behold a victim of the accursed game laws."

"You are a poacher, then?"

"That is the name which is applied to me."

"But how have you been wounded?"

"Let me tell my tale in my own fashion, and do not interrupt me. I shall live just long enough to tell you the whole, perhaps, but not longer; for I can feel that my injuries are mortal."

"What is the nature of them?" asked Sixteen-String Jack. "Let us know that, and then, perhaps, we may be able to relieve you."

"No—no. My hurts are past all relief, even the most skilful; but if you wish to know how it is I am here—how it is I am wounded; if you wish to listen to a tale of terrible, ornal, and unjust oppression, listen to what I have to say. If you do not, I will be silent."

And he sank back again upon the ground.

"Nay, speak," said Claude Duval, whose curiosity was strongly excited. "Let us hear what you have to say. We will promise not to interrupt you; and, as for harming you, that is quite out of the question, for we are fugitives from justice ourselves."

As he expected, the man was somewhat reassured by this piece of information, and he raised himself once more, but this time in such a manner that he partly rested himself against the trunk of the tree beneath which he was lying.

Then he spoke.

"Two years ago," he said, "I was looked upon as being the smartest young fellow in the country side. My parents were well to do, and I was their only child."

"Nothing important in my life took place till about two years ago, when I fell in with a company of young men, all somewhere about my own age."

"Well, they were free, rollicking fellows, every one of them; and nothing delighted them so much as sport and mischief."

"We carried on all manner of innocent freaks for a long time, and included among them snaring a hare now and then, or shooting a few pheasants occasionally."

"We had more than one skirmish with the keepers, and the intelligence was quickly communicated by them to the lord of the manor."

"He was a man good enough in many things, but he was what is called an upholder of the game laws—that is to say, he would only allow those the pleasure of sporting that he thought proper, and that favour was never accorded to his tenants, one of whom my father was."

"He sent a very threatening message concerning me and my depredations, as he called them; and my father, who knew his violent and vindictive temper, cautioned me to be careful."

"Well, so I was for a few days, until I fell in with the old lot again, and they proposed another night excursion. I had my father's warning ringing in my ears, and, for a moment, I hesitated; but unfortunately for me, I went."

"It seemed the keepers had some inkling of what was going to take place, and had made preparations accordingly. At first we saw nothing of them, and soon bagged a considerable quantity of game; and, when we had everyone of us got something or other in our possession, the keepers came upon us suddenly, and in great numbers. A desperate struggle ensued, and many hard blows were given on both sides."

"Several of my companions escaped."

"The remainder were taken prisoners."

"I was among the latter."

"We were placed in very safe custody, for our raptors determined that none of us should escape."

"In the morning we were brought before the lord of the manor, who, in conjunction with two other gentlemen, officiated as magistrates."

"You may guess, under these circumstances, what sort of mercy we had to expect."

"I knew, in a moment, we should be punished with the utmost rigour of the law."

"The crime, for such it was called, was clearly brought home against all of us."

"We were, in consequence, committed to take our trial at the next assizes."

"Bail was refused, although many offered it, and we were all haled off to the county jail, there to await the next assizes."

"This would be in nearly six months' time, for the last assizes were just over."

"In the jail, then, we were forced to remain until the expiration of the time I have mentioned, so we already suffered one sentence of imprisonment before we were tried."

"A good deal of indignation was expressed by several persons when they learned the particulars of the affair, but that made not the least difference to the lord of the manor, who determined that we should be severely dealt with, and made an example of."

"At length the assizes came round, and we were duly brought up for trial. I knew what we had to expect when the lord of the manor was our prosecutor."

"In short, for I may as well make an end of my tale, we were all sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment in the common jail."

"I quite despair of making you comprehend what an effect this affair had upon my parents."

"I was the first in their family who had ever become liable to the law, and they felt the degradation keenly."

"Besides this, the lord of the manor was not content to wreak his vengeance solely upon myself. During my imprisonment the term of my father's lease, under which he held the farm, expired, and he refused to renew it. This was a severe blow to my father, who had laid out all the little capital he possessed upon the farm, and now he found himself obliged to sacrifice it, for the landlord was inexorable."

"They had to turn out of the farm almost at a moment's notice."

"That ruined him."

"He was already almost broken-hearted to think that his only child should be the inmate of a jail."

"Well, gentlemen, he pined and pined away, and placed as I was, what could I do to assist him in the least? Over and over again did I curse myself for my foolishness, the lord of the manor for his unkindness, and my country, whose laws permitted such monstrous evils to exist."

"The next blow that came was the death of my mother. She was ailing and delicate, and this sudden reverse of fortune was too much for her to bear in her weak state."

"This was, you may depend, a severe blow to my father. Indeed he never rallied from it, and, on the day when the term of my imprisonment expired, he died."

"There I stood, then, alone in the world, without a friend, and with the curse of a crime hanging over my head."

"I walked to my native village."

"But the people, when they saw me, all shrunk from me. I had the contamination of the prison-house about me."

CHAPTER CCLXV.

THE POACHER'S STORY INCREASES IN INTEREST. A VIOLENT fit of coughing seized upon the poacher at this moment, and interrupted the continuation of his strange narrative.

The three friends exchanged glances, and then bent the whole of their attention upon the form at their feet.

Tom King thought, from the tone of this cough, that it was feigned, with a view probably to concealing his emotion.

And such was really the case.

By an effort, however, the poacher recovered himself.

The brandy which had been poured down his throat had recalled, in a wonderful degree, his fast-expiring energies; but now he felt that his strength was waning fast, and he hastened to bring his story to a conclusion ere death should seize upon him and prevent him.

And, indeed, the highwaymen, as they looked down upon his countenance, which the ghastly moonbeams rendered so distinctly visible, felt no small apprehension that death would appear before he had time to finish, for the traces of it were already to be seen.

It was the emotions which this recapitulation of the past had conjured up that overmastered the poacher, but, having recovered himself, he continued—

"All shunned me, and mine was a proud spirit. I could not brook their aversion, and I determined they should see me no more.

"And so I turned my back upon my native village, with the resolution firmly fixed in my mind that I would never return to it.

"But where was I to go?

"That was a question which very soon obtruded itself upon my notice, and which demanded my immediate attention.

"But I could not reply to it.

"Wherever I went, the taint of the prison-house would be upon me. I should be shut out from all the ordinary employments of my fellow-men.

"These thoughts were gloomy enough, and my mind was gloomy, too.

"It was while I was in this state that I entered a road-side public-house—for I was hungry, tired, and thirsty, and felt as though I must have rest and refreshment before I proceeded a yard further.

"Upon entering the kitchen of the public-house, what was my surprise to find seated there the whole of my prison companions. I mean those with whom I had been captured, and who had shared the jail with me.

"They greeted me, of course, and I recognized them readily enough, for I felt there was a kind of bond of misfortune between us.

"All spoke bitterly of what we were compelled to endure for so trivial an offence, for we could not look upon it in any other light; and after we had sat awhile and partook somewhat freely of the good things the house afforded, we vowed to band ourselves together and have a deep and lasting revenge for what we had suffered.

"We stayed at the public-house, talking the matter over, until night came, and then we went out.

"I ought to have told you that the place where this public-house was situated was a small village called Waltham.

"It is not very far from where we now are."

"Near this village there is a chase—almost as extensive as this one is.

"Towards this chase, then, which was only a short distance from the public-house, we went.

"We determined to take up our abode in it for the present, and fully concert our future proceedings.

"That very night, as we sat beneath some of the wide-spreading trees in the chase, we matured our plans, and swore a solemn oath of secrecy.

"We resolved that our revenge should be this.

"We would arm ourselves, and go in succession to the residences of all those persons who were in any way connected, directly or indirectly, with our imprisonment, and then make them suffer dearly for what they had done.

"When we came to this determination, we captured a fine deer, and the following night set out upon our errand of retribution.

"We had taken care to provide ourselves with arms, and we had sworn a solemn oath to continue true and steadfast to each other.

"We had also sworn not to allow any circumstances to cause us to desist until we had fully accomplished our mission.

"In order that we should not be recognized, we disguised ourselves in large white smock-frocks, and blacked our faces with a mixture of gunpowder.

"This not only answered our purpose of baffling recognition, but also imparted to us a most horrible and unnatural appearance; so that, we calculated, the very looks of us would strike terror into the stoutest heart.

"The arms we carried, too, gave us an exceedingly ferocious appearance.

"Thus equipped, we set out.

"I need not relate all the deeds which we performed, now, should I live long enough to be able to do so. Let it suffice to say, that we obtained our revenge upon almost all our persecutors before we suffered anything from the consequences of our actions.

"The whole country side was, however, soon thrown into the utmost confusion and dismay.

"Not knowing our intentions, people who had nothing whatever to apprehend from us grew terribly alarmed; and, in short, a general panic soon spread throughout the country.

"From the first, our depredations being almost wholly confined to one spot, and from our always being seen with our faces blacked, we received the appellation which has ever since clung to us.

"That appellation is **THE WALTHAM BLACKS.**"

"When the three highwaymen heard this announcement, although they were, in a manner of speaking, prepared (having anticipated it), they could not control a slight start of surprise.

"From time to time they had heard of the atrocities committed by, or, at all events, attributed to, the Waltham Blacks; and now strangely enough, one of their number lay at their feet.

"With greatly increased interest, therefore, they listened to the continuation of the narrative.

"The authorities were aroused, and very prompt and energetic measures were taken for our capture; but for a long time we eluded them, and still pursued our scheme of vengeance.

"As soon as we had consummated it, it was our intention to separate, and seek safety by flight to different quarters of the country.

"But until our design had reached a consummation, we were bound by our oath not to separate.

"A good many of the things which we did must have reached your ears, and, therefore, I will not repeat them.

"At length, the good fortune which we fancied had hitherto been ours, deserted us.

"Two of our band were captured one night, and on the succeeding day two more.

"This reduced our strength very materially, and on the third day the police-officers, having received some information of our whereabouts, came stealthily to the spot, and surprised us.

"Finding ourselves thus attacked, we fought desperately.

"But it was in vain.

"Their numbers were three times as great as ours.

"Retreat was cut off.

"We were surrounded, and, in the end, every one of us was taken prisoner.

"We were deemed such desperate offenders that there was but one prison in the kingdom considered strong enough to hold us, and that was Newgate.

"Towards this place, then, we were all led without delay.

"My companions all seemed to give themselves up to despair, and to resign themselves to their fate.

"But I did not.

"I resolved to make my escape, if such a thing was at all within the bounds of possibility.

"This resolve I kept before my mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts, and keenly watched for any opportunity with which I might be favoured.

"As we got nearer and nearer to London, however, my hopes diminished.

"But I would not despair.

"At last, however, we fairly entered London.

"We traversed its busy streets, until at length the gloomy prison of Newgate was reached.

"As we paused beneath its portals, a shudder passed over me, and hope fled.

"Suddenly, however, as we were being marshalled into the prison, I saw a chance, if I made one desperate effort, of effecting my escape.

"I resolved to make that desperate effort, for, let me do what I would, I could not make my position worse than it was now.

"Urged on by despair, I struggled furiously when it came to my turn to be led into the prison.

"They were unprepared for this attack.

"I was the last, and all the others had gone in quietly and peaceably enough.

"You know what it is if you can take your opponents by surprise.

"I broke from their hold.

"I was free.

"A little crowd of people had collected, as they always do, round the door of Newgate, and when they saw my bold action, they applauded me, and, separating, allowed me quick passage through their ranks.

"The officers were, however, very soon upon my track.

"I was running for my life, and the exertions I then made seem, when I look back to them, as being utterly beyond belief.

"However, in the end I escaped. I am compelled to hurry over the remainder of my story, for each breath I draw, comes with difficulty from my lungs.

"It is enough to tell you I escaped, but I was the only one who was so fortunate.

"The rest of my companions were brought up for trial, and sentenced to death.

"They all suffered at Tyburn.

"Thus I was left alone.

"Some kind of fascination seemed to draw me to the scene of my former exploits.

"I still continued my depredations. Indeed, since the time I have mentioned, I have made my home almost entirely in this forest and those near to it, but—"

The voice abruptly ceased.

The poacher, with a faint groan, fell back.

"He's gone at last, poor fellow!" said Tom King.

"No—no; I think not," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Quick! Claude; quick! Hold up his head again, and let me pour some more brandy down his throat."

This was done, and then, somewhat to the surprise of Tom, the man gave signs of fresh life and of recovery.

It was a minute or two before he could speak, although he tried several times to do so.

At last, however, he gasped out—

"Water—water!"

Claude Duval no sooner heard these words, than he hastened off to procure some, if possible.

His two comrades remained.

The poacher drew himself up again, but manifestly with great pain, and he said—

"I am going—I am going fast. Listen, and I will tell you the rest. I have lived here a solitary life. You told me, did you not, that they were fugitives from justice?"

"We did."

"And such is the case?"

"It is."

"Then I will repay your good offices by the disclosure of something which may prove to be of as much value to you as it has been to me; for when, many a time, I have been hard pressed by the keepers, I—"

"What—what?" said Tom King, anxiously bending over him.

"I have found safe refuge there. Look! do you see the rocks yonder, which form the precipice at the base of which you found me lying?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, then, if you will go from here in a straight line, you will see a large bush of prickly thorn. I can see it here, or my dying eyes deceive me. Look—look!"

"Yes, I can see a bush," said Tom King, "or what looks very much like one."

"It is one. Go up to it, and take hold of one of the top twigs, and bend it down. You will find, with a little pressure, it will almost lie flat upon the ground. Upon doing this, an opening in the rocks will be disclosed. It is the entrance to a cavern, and so cunningly hidden as to defy detection, for when you release your hold upon the thorn-bush, it will fly up into its natural position, and the opening in the rock will then be invisible."

The two highwaymen listened eagerly to these words, but the poacher continued to speak rapidly; and, fearful that they should lose some important information, they forbore to interrupt him in any way.

"That secret cave has been a place of shelter for me many a time; and now let me make all clear to you. Two nights ago, as I was coming through the chase, I trod unexpectedly upon a matrap, of which there are

many lying about. In a moment the sharp iron teeth fixed themselves in my leg.

"The pain was so great that I sank down on the ground in a swoon, from which, however, the dreadful agony I endured soon recovered me.

"I could not refrain from uttering several groans, my anguish was so terrible.

"For some time after I recovered myself from my swoon I lay on the ground without moving. My pain seemed to paralyze me.

"But the dread that the keepers would shortly make their rounds and discover me, inspired me with fortitude, and gradually I rose to my feet.

"I found myself, however, utterly unable to release myself. The spring was too much for my strength, and, moreover, I was in such a position that I could not obtain proper power over it.

"Finding this to be the case, I lay down and gave myself up to despair.

"I tried all I could to resign myself to the fate which I felt sure awaited me.

"In this way hour after hour passed by.

"The severity of my pain now somewhat abated.

"It seemed to subside into a feeling of numbness.

"Finding this to be the case, I raised myself a little from the ground, and had a look at the trap once more, in the faint hope that I might be able to free myself from it.

"But this second effort only served to show me the futility of the first one.

"I was never one, however, to succumb to difficulties.

"The idea struck me that I might unfix the matrap from the ground, and drag it after me, either until I met with someone who could release me, or until I could find some means of releasing myself.

"I set about acting upon this idea at once, and after incredible suffering and labour, I succeeded in loosening the matrap from its fastenings.

"I now tried to drag it along the ground with me, but the frightful anguish which the attempt occasioned me compelled me to desist.

"My position seemed now to be worse, if anything, than it was before."

CHAPTER CCCLXVI.

TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKE AN EXAMINATION OF THE POACHER'S SECRET CAVE.

THE dying poacher seemed to gain fresh energy as he proceeded; and he now continued the relation of his strange adventures in a rapid tone of voice, as though he was desirous of bringing it to a conclusion.

"Still I had done a good deal, I thought, and that stimulated me to make fresh efforts.

"Looking all round me, I at length espied a large round stone.

"Could I but crawl towards it and obtain possession of it, I thought I might perhaps be able, by using it as a hammer, to so break the springs of the trap as to be able to set myself at liberty.

"But the stone seemed to be far out of my way, and I feared I should not be able to reach it.

"By slow degrees, however, I managed to decrease the distance it was from me, until at length, by lying down and stretching out my hand, I was able to grasp it.

"A gush of joy came over my heart when I found that I fairly had it in my possession; and, impatient to test this mode of operations, I commenced my attack forthwith.

"The stone, I found, was but ill-adapted for the purpose I required; but I had no better tool, and I persevered.

"After hammering for a long while—I cannot tell you how long, I so far weakened the springs and otherwise broke the trap, that, in the end, I managed to free my leg.

"I fainted when this was done.

"As before I was brought back to my senses by the intolerable aching of my wounded limb.

"I sat up and tried to examine it.

"It was swelled to thrice its usual size.

"Blood was slowly oozing from it, for the sharp teeth had penetrated far into the flesh."

"It is a thousand wonders that the bone was not broken—indeed, I am by no means sure that it is not, for I have never had the slightest use in either leg or foot since.

"The chase was familiar enough to me, and I knew whereabouts to look for the nearest stream of water.

"Thither I made my way, and bathed my leg in the cool water.

"I then found that there was every symptom of inflammation, or something worse, having commenced.

"I bathed it, however, as well as I could.

"But when I had finished, I found my strength was almost gone; and my leg, though at first much easier after bathing it, now increased in painfulness to a terrible degree.

"I had no use in it whatever; and, when I stood up and tried to drag it along after me, it seemed as though it would drop off.

"But it is no good for me to linger over my dreadful sufferings. I found myself continually growing weaker, and, upon looking at the wounded place again, I could tell that it was mortifying.

"I could feel the pain which proceeded from it all over my whole body.

"It almost seemed as though the teeth of the trap had been anointed with some poisonous substance; though perhaps it was the rust with which it was encrusted.

"I felt confident that the hurt was a mortal one, and resolved to crawl, if I possibly could, as far as the secret cave of which I have spoken, where I intended to lie down and die unseen.

"As I made my way towards it, my torment became extreme, and, from time to time, I could not repress a cry of agony which was indeed forced from my lips.

"It must have been this which you heard.

"I crawled on and on until I arrived at the base of the rocks where you saw me. I was completely overcome, and my sufferings were so terrible that I groaned frequently.

"In the silence of the spot I heard you arrive at the verge of the precipice above. I heard you speak to each other, but I could not distinguish what you said.

"I was lying with my face upwards, and I could see you looking down upon me. The idea, of course, entered my mind that you were the keepers in quest of me; and acting under the influence of that impression, I crawled away among the underwood; but, when I reached this tree, my strength deserted me, and I could go no further."

These last few sentences had been uttered with increasing faintness, and Jack again administered some of the brandy.

At this moment Claude returned with some water.

But the man was too far gone for it to have a revivifying power upon him.

He passed his hands repeatedly over his eyes as he gasped, rather than said—

"The cave—the cave! I have told you all, now, and I shall die in peace. You will find it a good place for concealment, and it will be your own fault if you do anything to betray it. Ha! you have come at last! I have been deceived! False—false! Off! I say; off! Slay me, if you will; but you shall not take me prisoner! Off—off! I!"

The last words died away in an inarticulate gurgle, and he fell back dead.

For a moment or two neither of our friends broke the silence which followed the poacher's death.

Presently Claude spoke.

"It's all over with him at last, poor fellow! and I am very sorry for it. He was a brave fellow, there's no mistake about that; and it is a pity a brave man should ever die such a death as he has."

"It is, indeed, a pity," rejoined Sixteen-String Jack. "But it's no good grieving over it; the fault is none of ours."

"True, we have the consolation of knowing that we did all we could for him."

"So we have," added Tom King. "You were talking about our having an adventure, Claude, and we have with a vengeance."

"Yes," said Claude, "and I wonder what sort of a place this cave is that he talks about. I am afraid we shall find it all a myth."

"Why so?"

"It is quite clear that his senses wandered part of the time, and it may be that this cave was but some illusion of the imagination."

"We can soon put that doubt at rest," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but, first of all, I think we ought to ascertain whether he is really dead or not."

"By all means let us do so."

"An examination of the poacher's body was now made, and the result of it was that they found life quite extinct."

A feeling of curiosity caused them to look at the leg which had been caught in the trap.

They found that the bone was broken, and that mortification of the limb had taken place, which was the immediate cause of death.

"This is a nice state of things, is it not?" said Tom King. "I fairly shudder when I think of the risk we have so blindly run. We must be careful for the future where we tread."

"We must, indeed, or no one knows how soon that poor fellow's fate will be ours."

"As Tom says, I fairly shudder when I think of the danger we have been ignorantly exposed to."

"There is but one thing for us to do," said Claude, "and that is to exercise the utmost caution."

"You are right. But come, since it seems we cannot do any more for this poor fellow, let us find whether there really is a cave or not."

"With all my heart," replied Tom King. "But I don't quite agree with you when you say that we cannot do any more for this poor fellow here."

"You mean we might afford him decent burial, and so prevent his body being a feast for carrion?"

"Just so."

"We will do that, decidedly. But you know what I meant when I spoke?"

"Of course."

"Come on, then."

"The highwaymen now made their way to the particular part of the rock which the poacher had pointed out.

Upon arriving there they were somewhat puzzled, for they found that the rock for some distance was overgrown with the thorn bushes of which the dying poacher had spoken.

This was all the better, so far as the secrecy of the cave was concerned, but it made our friends' task of discovering it difficult.

It was Tom King who hit upon an excellent expedient for ascertaining which was the particular thorn-bush they sought.

He drew his sword, and plunged it into all of them in succession.

He was rewarded for his trouble after several trials, in each of which the point of his sword, passing through the bush, struck the rock.

Presently, however, the sword went in up to the hilt without coming in contact with any obstacle.

"Here it is," he cried, exultingly.

He sheathed his sword as he spoke.

In the meantime, Claude and Jack, who were full of anxiety, caught hold of the upper portion of the bush in the manner they had been directed, and, giving it a smart pull, they found it come towards them.

They continued their pressure until it reached the ground, and then a black looking opening in the rock was disclosed, which seemed just about large enough for a man to enter.

This was confirmation of what the poacher had told them.

The curiosity of the highwaymen was by no means appeased.

They wanted now to explore this cavern, and ascertain its character.

But all within was most profoundly dark.

This did not much signify, for the highwaymen took care to be never unprovided with the means of obtaining a light.

"A torch will be the thing to assist us in our explorations," said Tom King; "and we can soon form one from the branch of the first resinous tree we come to."

"Of course we can."

"Then let us look about us, my friends, and provide ourselves with several, in case they should be needed."

Our friends had not far to look for the species of wood

they required; and, having rudely trimmed half-a-dozen pieces into the form of torches, they returned to the entrance of the secret cave.

As before, they pulled down the thorn-bush, and Claude Duval held it in that position while Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack entered.

They halted just inside the entrance, and there, being sheltered from the wind, they proceeded to ignite one of the torches.

As soon as it had fairly caught light, and there was no fear of its being suddenly extinguished, Claude entered, too.

By seizing some of the twigs on the inner side, and pulling them towards them, they were able to fill up the gap completely, and so that no one could have told what was behind it from the other side.

Tom King had the torch, and he held it as high above his head as he could.

By the aid of its light they found they were standing in a rude, arched passage, rather narrow and tolerably high.

It seemed to extend for some distance in a straight line, though to where it led the light they carried did not enable them to determine.

The air did not seem altogether of the purest, for the torch burned but dimly.

Finding they had so little light, two more torches were ignited, which were carried by Claude and Jack.

The ground beneath their feet was firm and level, and they made their way at a rather rapid rate along the passage.

It was about a hundred feet in length, and so irregular in height, shape, and width, as plainly proclaimed it to be the work of nature unassisted by art.

After going the distance we have mentioned, they suddenly emerged into a spacious cavern.

A cold chill struck them as they entered it, and the air seemed much purer and fresher than that in the passage.

The torches burned more freely, but still the light they gave was quite inadequate to illuminate the vast extent of the cavern.

Claude Duval stationed himself at the entrance of the passage with a torch in his hand.

This was a by no means unnecessary precaution, for, if it should prove that there were other recesses in the cavern presenting a similar appearance, they might be puzzled to find their way out again.

While Jack and Tom King were thus engaged in their explorations, they found that a soft, gentle light began to pervade the whole of the cavern.

It stole upon them so gradually that they were unaware of its approach until the cave was quite filled with it.

At first they could not account for this phenomenon.

The place was quite dark when they entered it, and now it was every moment getting lighter, and they could see, not only the sides of the cavern, but also numerous natural columns, which appeared to have the effect of supporting the roof.

This, however, was invisible.

A kind of hazy mist seemed to have settled there, which hid it from view.

It was evidently from this mist that the light proceeded.

What could it be?

After a little thought our friends hit upon it.

The roof of the cavern was an immense distance from the floor, and, doubtless, in it were numerous small crevices through which the light came.

But, if this was the case, day must have dawned, and the time arrived when Dick Turpin promised to return.

No sooner did they recollect this, than they precipitately left the cavern.

Upon emerging into the open air, they found that, not only day had dawned, but that the sun had risen.

Finding this to be the case, they hastened towards the spot where they expected to find their comrade.

But they might have spared themselves the trouble, for, as the reader is aware, at that very moment Dick Turpin was flying for his life.

CHAPTER CCCLXVII.

A TROOP OF OFFICERS ARRIVE RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY AT THE "BULL AND GATE," AND DICK'S POSITION BECOMES EXCEEDINGLY CRITICAL.

"LOOK! look, Dick! What is that yonder? Do you see that cloud of dust? What is it? Oh! what is it?"

It was Maud Gouldman, who, in an anxious tone of voice, addressed these words to our hero.

As she spoke, she pointed in a particular direction with her finger.

It was close upon sunset, and they were standing together at one of the windows in the "Bull and Gate" inn.

Some hours have elapsed since we saw them last.

The time was occupied in coming to an understanding with each other.

And now, having succeeded in doing this, they were standing, as we have said, at one of the windows in the public-house.

They had been looking at the magnificent prospect spread out before them, for the room in which they were was on the upper floor, and was fitted with a large, old-fashioned bow-window.

It was the best room in the inn, and was never used except upon special occasions.

But the liberal manner in which Dick paid for what he had, caused the landlord to offer him the best accommodation he had at his disposal.

When she spoke, Dick Turpin looked immediately in the direction to which his fair companion pointed.

It was along the road, and the way they had come.

The glowing rays of the setting sun shone somewhat perplexingly into the room, and Dick put up his hand to shade his eyes from them, so as to have a good look in advance.

There, as she had said, he could distinctly perceive a cloud of dust, which indicated the approach of some large troop either of horses or men.

"What is it? Oh! what is it?" said Maud, anxiously, repeating her former inquiry. "Tell me at once."

"I am by no means certain what it is."

"But it may be our foes?"

"It may be, but I scarcely think it probable."

"Still it is possible."

"It is."

"Oh! fly! fly! Let us fly at once! Do not let us incur any unnecessary danger. Let us fly at once."

"I would rather ascertain whether they really are officers upon the road."

"How can you do that?"

"We shall see them presently."

"No, no; a thousand times no! Such a course would be by far too dangerous. We should not have time to fly, then."

Dick smiled at the alarm of his companion, which was, however, nothing more than natural.

"I will tell you what I will do," he said, "and that will quiet all your apprehensions. I will summon the landlord, and tell him to have Black Bees saddled and brought to the back door. Should there be any danger we shall then be able to fly, and leave our pursuers far behind."

Maud consented to this arrangement, but with considerable reluctance.

Dick, however, called the landlord, and gave him his instructions.

He was promised immediate obedience.

During this time Maud had not once removed her eyes from the cloud of dust which she had seen.

The road extended before them in a straight line, until it vanished to a point.

It was at this point where she had first seen the cloud of dust.

Now, however, it was very much nearer, which showed that whoever was on the road was coming at a good speed.

Still, nothing of them could be seen.

Dick rejoined Maud at the window, and, not without feeling some anxiety himself, looked out.

He had stayed at the inn until now for several reasons. Perhaps the first one was on account of Black Bees.

He knew how much depended upon her fleetness and endurance.

Her strength had been severely tried during the past

night, and he was anxious she should have rest sufficient to recover from it.

They had, too, a long way to go before they could reach Enfield Chase.

And Black Bess would have to carry a double load.

These reasons alone were sufficient to cause Dick to remain, but there were others as well.

He did not know what other means could be found of conveying Maud to Enfield Chase without their destination being known, which he wanted to keep a profound secret, unless he adopted the same means as before.

But this kind of travelling was, in the highest degree, calculated to excite attention.

For this reason Dick resolved to postpone the commencement of his journey until night.

He calculated upon reaching his destination about dawn the next morning.

There was now one point upon which he felt any anxiety, and that was that his comrades, finding he did not return at the appointed time, would fear that some accident had befallen him, and would, contrary to his injunctions, set out in search of him.

If the truth must be told, Dick felt but little alarm when the cloud of dust was pointed out to him, for the simple reason that he could not conceive by what means the officers could have got upon his track.

Nevertheless, he did not regret the precaution which, for the sake of soothing his companion's fears, he had taken.

All around was very still, and presently Dick's keen ear could distinguish a faint sound, which was perfectly well known to him.

"They are horsemen who are approaching," he said; and, after he spoke, Maud noticed that he looked with much greater eagerness than before.

She was soon able herself to recognize the trampling of horses' hoofs.

Louder and louder they grew, but still the riders continued invisible, in consequence of the dust which enveloped them.

Suddenly, however, Dick drew back from the window.

The horsemen had come near enough for him to know who they were.

They were mounted police-officers.

Maud did not require to be told this.

She guessed it in a moment.

"They are your foes," she said.

"They are officers," rejoined Turpin; "there can be no doubt about that."

"Then fly—fly at once! Why do you hesitate?"

"Because I was considering whether I should not do better by remaining here."

"What, and be captured?"

"Nay—nay; I did not mean that. But do not look so alarmed, or suffer your mind to be so filled with apprehension. Believe me, I do not think we are in any danger."

"Why, then, are the officers on the road?"

"That I cannot tell you, but they might be there without having the slightest connection with me. I do not think it possible that they could have tracked me hither. If it had, they would have been here long before this."

Maud was only half-satisfied with this reasoning, but she was silent.

Dick was anxious to reassure her.

"If these officers who are now approaching so rapidly are on the look-out for someone else, my safest place will be here, because they will pass by; and, believe me, I would willingly allow those gentlemen the precedence, and have them on the road before instead of behind me."

"I can understand all that," interrupted Maud; "but the danger."

"I have considered that. Suppose, now, that these officers were in pursuit of me, that their business had nothing to do with me, and I was to go out and gallop away. I should be seen, and a pursuit be instantly commenced; and this, if only for your sake, I would fain avoid."

"But how shall you learn whether they are in search for you until too late?"

"How too late?"

"For you to make your escape."

"Easily."

"The officers are close here now."

"I can tell that by the sounds. You stand by the window, and keep a look-out. I will keep here, in the middle of the room, and so avoid being seen. How far are the officers off?"

"Only a few yards."

"They have slackened speed, have they not?"

"Yes."

"What are they doing?"

"They seem to be talking to each other in an excited manner, as though they could not agree about something."

"But they are still slowly approaching the inn?"

"Oh! yes."

"Draw back a little. Do not let them see you if you can avoid it."

Maud obeyed.

But she did not remove her gaze for one second from the group of officers.

They were now coming at a walking pace, and presently, to the great alarm of Maud, one of them raised his riding-whip and pointed to the inn.

He accompanied the action with some words uttered in a loud tone of voice; but what the words were she could not tell, although she strained her sense of hearing to the utmost.

Dick now began to grow terribly anxious and fidgety.

"Tell me," he said, "if they go on, or whether they stop at the inn-door."

"We shall soon know that. Oh! fly! Fly at once, while there is yet time!"

"There is plenty of time; and, by acting precipitately, I might draw down upon myself that very danger which I am so anxious to avoid."

Finding him thus determined, Maud Gouldman urged the matter no longer, but continued to rivet her attention upon the officers, among whom a dispute of some sort or other was unquestionably taking place.

Some were of one way of thinking—some of another.

But Maud could not ascertain what the difference arose from.

They were all walking very leisurely.

The horses looked tired and weary, and their sides were wet with perspiration.

How Maud's heart beat as the momentous crisis arrived!

Would they pass the inn?

How that would lighten her heart of the fearful load which now weighed it down!

Alas!

It was not to be so.

The dispute, whatever it was, terminated.

The officers drew up in front of the inn.

More than this Maud did not wait to see.

With her face the picture of alarm, she rushed towards Dick, who, during the last few moments, had occupied himself in loading and repriming his pistols.

"Fly—fly!" she cried. "I fear it is too late."

"No, no. Be calm, and then all will be well. Are you sure the officers have stopped?"

"Yes."

"Go once more to the window, and see whether they have passed on."

Maud felt there was a slight hope in this, and she obeyed instantly.

She almost shrieked with terror.

"No, no," she cried. "They are all dismounting hastily from their steeds, and entering the inn. Oh! what shall we do?—what shall we do?"

"Calm yourself," said Dick, quietly, whose manner afforded a striking contrast to that of his companion; "calm yourself, I pray! It is the time for action! Come!"

He passed his arm round her waist as he spoke, and, going towards the door of the room, he opened it and passed out.

The sounds of many loud voices struck upon his ears, convincing him of the truth of the intelligence which Maud had just given him.

But he could not tell what was said, so many were speaking at once; nor, indeed, did he stay to listen.

He had noticed the interior arrangements of the inn, and he was certain he could make his way anywhere about it without difficulty.

He reached the top of the stairs, but paused ere he descended them.



[THE MARRIAGE OF DICK TURPIN IN ENFIELD CHASE.]

He fancied he could hear voices at the foot. Thus, perceiving, as she thought, all hope of retreat cut off, Maud suffered an agony of apprehension. But not so our hero.

With a stealthy tread, he passed the top of the stairs, and entered a room the door of which was nearly opposite and only a few paces distant from the top of the stairs.

The room was vacant, and fitted as a bed-chamber. There was a large window in it, with a folding case-ment which opened like a door.

This opened on to a kind of rude wooden balcony, or gallery, which ran along the back of the building, on a level with the first floor.

Dick opened this window with all speed, and passed through it.

Then he assisted his companion to follow him.

No sooner was Dick on the wooden gallery than he looked over the railing which protected it.

From this place he commanded a view of the back door.

No Black Bess was there.

But, looking in the direction of the stable, he saw the fat Ostler, Obi, leading her along. So far, then, all seemed well.

Maud grew calmer and more collected when she saw the chances of escape thus increase.

There was at both extremities of the wooden balcony a rude flight of steps, which led down to the yard below.

To the nearest of these Dick now directed his own and his companion's footsteps.

As yet he saw nothing of the officers.

They made all the speed they possibly could, and the top of the flight of rickety steps was quickly reached.

Down this they sped with a rapidity which astonished themselves, and caused Obi to look up with a kind of sleepy wonderment.

CHAPTER CCLXVIII.

DICK TURPIN HAS A GREAT DEAL OF DIFFICULTY
SHAKING OFF HIS PURSUERS.

But Dick paid little, if any, attention to the sleepy ostler.

His thoughts were intent upon one object.

That was to reach Black Bess in the smallest possible space of time.

Right glad was he to see that his gallant mare was fully caparisoned for the road, and ready for instant service.

The exertions she had already made did not seem to have had any effect upon her.

Her coat was sleek, and her neck proudly arched, while at every step she took she seemed to "spurn the ground."

Dick felt his eyes grow with admiration as they lighted upon the steed to whom he owed so much, and to whom he was about to trust to save himself from the foes who were so close at hand.

He did not pause when he reached the bottom of the wooden steps, but hastened forward to where Obi stood.

With great promptitude he swung Maud up on to the fore part of the saddle.

Having done this, he put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth another half-crown to reward the sleepy ostler for his services.

Just as he was placing it in his hand, however, the back door of the inn was thrown open.

The sound caused Dick to turn in that direction, and there he saw the landlord of the "Bull and Gate," with a throng of Bow-street officers around him.

"There he is! there he is!" they cried, and, as they uttered these words, they made a rush to the spot where Turpin was standing.

But, ere they could reach it, our hero had vaulted into the saddle.

In an instant he passed his left arm round Maud's waist, thus retaining her in her position, and took hold of the reins.

In the other hand he held a loaded pistol.

He did not wait to see or hear what the officers would do, but, the moment he found himself fairly in the saddle, he fired the pistol at his foes, producing considerable confusion among their ranks, and then threw the discharged weapon among them.

At the same moment he touched Black Bess lightly on the flank with the heel.

The touch was sufficient.

She gave one tremendous bound, and then set forward at a gallop which she alone was able to perform.

A shout came from the officers, and they made a simultaneous rush to the front door, where they had left their horses standing.

Then ensued an immense scrambling into saddles.

But, though they made all speed, by the time they were ready to start, Dick had got a long way ahead.

He had leaped a low wall that bounded the inn yard, and gained the high road, along which he sped at a rate that made pursuit appear ridiculous.

But the officers did not intend to give in without making an effort, at least, to capture their prey.

The large reward that was offered, and the renown that they would gain should they succeed in capturing the celebrated highwayman, acted upon them as very powerful stimulants for action.

Plunging their spurs, then, into the flanks of their exhausted cattle, they tore along the road.

Dick Turpin was just visible in the distance, but the reason of this was the straightness of the road, which enabled them to see for a long way.

Our hero was never aware of one circumstance connected with this affair; and it is as well, perhaps, that he was not, for the knowledge would only have supplied him with cause for vexation.

But there is no reason why the reader should remain in ignorance of it.

The troop of officers, then, who were now in full pursuit, and who had been perceived by Maud, had not the least idea, when they halted at the door of the inn, that Dick Turpin was staying there.

They were in search of him, however.

Indeed, all the principal roads round the metropolis

were at this time patrolled by large bodies of officers, whose duty it was to keep a sharp look-out for Dick Turpin and his comrades, and to spare no means of taking them prisoners, either dead or alive.

They had been upon the road for some hours, and both horses and men were tired; so, upon perceiving in the distance the sign of the "Bull and Gate" inn, they slackened speed, and a rather animated discussion ensued as to whether they should pause there a little while for refreshment, or push on.

In the end they resolved to stop, and they accordingly did so.

In all probability, having no suspicions upon the point, they would have left without knowing that Turpin was there, or disturbing him in the least.

But fate had decreed it otherwise.

Upon alighting at the door of the inn, they spoke to the landlord, who came forward to receive them, and then entered.

The horses were, however, left at the door in charge of one of the officers.

The remainder inquired for the ostler.

The landlord then replied that he would be disengaged directly, as he was at that moment engaged in saddling a gentleman's horse.

The officers walked down the passage, and into the inn kitchen, which was situated at the back of the house, and had a large bow-window, which commanded a view of the yard.

Nothing was more natural than that, on entering this place, the officers should look through the window into the yard.

Indeed, they could scarcely avoid doing so, for the door was immediately facing the window.

They looked through it, then, and the first thing they saw was Obi, the ostler, leading a beautiful black horse.

Now, of course, these officers had been furnished with very accurate descriptions both of Dick Turpin and his steed, and the first glance they gave at this black horse in the yard engendered the suspicion in their minds that they had by accident fallen upon what they so wished to find.

Ere they could recover from their surprise, or, indeed, give a second glance at the beautiful black steed, they saw two figures move rapidly across the yard towards the ostler.

Here they paused; and, with a rapidity that bewildered them, they saw Maud swung on to the saddle.

They then had a good view of Dick.

They recognized him instantly.

A wild sort of howl came from their lips, and, as if actuated by one impulse, all rushed towards the back door of the inn.

They were in hopes of being able to surround Dick, or reach him before he was able to mount.

But in this hope they were disappointed.

His movements were much quicker than they thought they could be.

What now ensued the reader is already aware, and from what he knows of the character of Black Bess, for swiftness and endurance, he will think that the officers stood rather a poor chance.

But pertinacious perseverance will do a great deal, and we must wait and see what the officers will accomplish by hanging on the track of the highwaymen.

As for Dick himself, as soon as he saw what a capital start he had got, he dismissed all thoughts of uneasiness from his mind, and let his mare go at a pace which, though a swift one, was not swift enough to distress her.

From time to time he cast anxious glances back, and so did his companion.

But the sun had now set, and darkness was fast beginning to render distant objects indistinct.

This was a favourable circumstance for Dick, since it made his chances of escape all the greater.

Coming at last to a long, steep hill, he allowed his mare to ascend at a walking pace.

Upon reaching the summit, he halted and faced round to the direction in which he had just come.

From the top of the hill a very extensive view of the surrounding country could be obtained.

But the outlines of the various objects were confused and indistinct.

Only the highest features of the landscape could be distinguished.

The valleys were filled with darkness.

Looking back upon the road he had come, Dick strained his eyes in an endeavour to pierce the obscurity which lay below him, and to obtain a glimpse of his foes.

But both attempts were equally unsuccessful.

On the top of a hill, however, Turpin was aware that sounds could be heard from a great distance—more especially if he applied his ear to the ground.

He resolved to adopt this expedient, and, having acquainted Maud with his intention, he dismounted.

He laid himself down at full length, and, putting his ear flat on the ground, listened for some moments with the utmost intension.

But all was still.

He could not distinguish any sound, however faint, which indicated the approach of his enemies.

From this circumstance he came rather too abruptly to the conclusion that they had given up the chase.

He, therefore, leisurely rose to his feet, and again mounted his mare.

But, although he was so easy and confident, his companion was quite the reverse.

To her danger of their situation seemed magnified a thousand times.

As Dick placed his foot in the stirrup, she said to him, anxiously—

"Look, look. Oh! what is that over the hedge? Look! I can see men, and horses too. Oh! Dick, your foes are upon you. We are lost!"

These words were spoken in a low, suppressed voice, and in accents of the utmost terror.

They were calculated to have rather an embarrassing effect upon Dick—just at the moment when he was felicitating himself upon being so uncommonly safe.

Dick was one, however, who never allowed surprise to long retain the mastery over him.

He was in the saddle in a moment.

But before he had time to look and ascertain the truth of Maud's information, there was a flash and a report.

He felt something hot whistle by his cheek.

Then he heard a voice cry—

"Forward! forward, my lads, and we have him! I winged him that time, I'll be sworn! Forward! forward!"

There was a hasty trampling of feet, and the cracking of twigs, as the words were uttered.

Dick comprehended the state of affairs in a moment.

The officers had been cunning enough to leave the high road and take to the fields.

On the soft turf they made scarcely any sounds in their progress.

They had continued to push on at full speed, and had galloped up the hill while Dick walked it.

When they reached the top they saw him.

Had it not been for the warning received from Maud Gouldman, Dick would have found his position much more serious than it actually was.

However, he knew that he was unhurt, and that the best thing he could do was to set off at full speed.

He did so, and shortly received from Maud the gratifying assurance that she had not been in any way injured by the pistol-shot which had been fired.

This was the only thing which Dick cared for; and, having received the assurance that she was unhurt, his heart grew light again.

Still, he resolved to shake off his foes as quickly as possible.

He was annoyed with himself to think he had allowed them to gain upon him in the manner he had.

One thing was certain.

He must shake off his foes at once, or else give up all idea of making his way to Enfield Chase, or they would be too much upon his track and the secret of his retreat be in danger of discovery.

Indeed, as it was, he thought it would be better if he could change his course, and so mislead them as to the direction he had taken.

Impressed with this idea, he turned down a lane that branched off from the high road.

The officers descended the hill with break-neck speed, and followed after him.

Dick heard the clatter of their horses' hoofs.

Convinced that they were in the lane, Dick now urged

Black Bess, for once in her life, to put forth her utmost speed.

The result was surprising.

Away she flew, at a speed which would be deemed incredible, and which, perhaps, none but a mare of her matchless breed could accomplish.

The faint clattering of the officers' horses' hoofs died away into utter silence.

Still Dick was careful not to pull up too soon, and so run the slightest risk of making his enemies aware of his intentions.

Presently, however, he pulled up.

He listened for a moment, but all was still.

He then backed his mare close to the bank of the ditch on one side of the road, and made her face the hedge on the side opposite.

It was only a low one, and he was convinced she would clear it easily.

Nor was he mistaken in his calculations.

She gave one spring, and alighted on the soft ground in the meadow.

Dick had considered his position, and he now shaped his course across the field, in what, he thought, was as nearly as possible a straight line to Enfield Chase.

His judgment did not deceive him.

In a short time he emerged upon the high road, along which he took his way at an easy gallop.

He was now tolerably free from apprehension.

He could hear nothing of his foes, and he doubted not that he had baffled them completely.

But he resolved to waste no more time, and not to allow them another opportunity to come up with him.

He beguiled the tediousness of his journey by conversing with his companion, who now began to experience a feeling of greater security than she had hitherto done.

CHAPTER CCCLXIX.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN AT LENGTH ARRIVE SAFELY AT ENFIELD CHASE.

It was just about daylight on the morning following when Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman came in sight of Enfield Chase.

The night had been occupied with travelling incessantly. Black Bess had rather a tired look, but still she sped along as though she was aware the termination of her journey was almost reached.

Dick had taken the opportunity, which their long ride had afforded him, to explain to his companion his exact position in life.

He also mentioned his three companions, who, the reader will bear in mind, Maud had never seen, and never even heard of.

Dick put the worst face upon everything; but Maud still continued willing to share his lot, whatever it might be.

Our hero could not avoid being touched with this devotion, and a sharp pang shot through his heart as he asked himself what was to be the termination of this romantic affection.

Indeed, the thought was so painful a one, that he endeavoured to banish it from his mind altogether.

Dick could not help feeling anxious with respect to his comrades.

He was now something like twenty-four hours beyond the time he had appointed for his return.

He knew their impatience, and felt almost certain that it would not stand such a trial as that.

They would be ignorant of the cause of his delay, and would doubtless come to the conclusion that some mischief had befallen him.

When once they had got hold of this idea, he knew they would not rest until they had set out in search of him.

And this was what he dreaded, for of course they would be ignorant of the presence of so many of their foes upon the road, and their danger would be that much increased.

He did not keep his thoughts secret from Maud, but freely told her what was passing through his mind.

At length Dick reached the spot where he had parted from his comrades, and which they had mutually agreed should be the meeting-place.

He looked around him in vain for any signs of their appearance.

All was still.

The birds had scarcely yet begun to chirp and leap from bough to bough.

Dick was quite sure he had not been observed to enter the chase by anyone.

A long time had elapsed since he had seen a human being.

And now, as they stood thus upon the appointed spot, they might, without any great stretch of the imagination, have easily imagined themselves alone in the world.

The hour was, perhaps, about the stillest of the whole twenty-four, and they were in one of the thinnest populated districts in England.

Dick waited anxiously and impatiently for several minutes, but no sign of his comrades appeared, and his worst suspicions were realized.

They had gone off in search of him, and the result of this would probably be that they would either be taken prisoners, or their hiding-place discovered.

As a last hope, and not that he thought it would be responded to, Dick uttered a kind of chirping whistle, with which, in olden times, he had been wont to summon his comrades.

The shrill sounds died away upon the silent air, but there was no reply.

Dick dismounted, and assisted his companion to alight.

"This fills me with uneasiness," he said; "but it is no more than I expected. What to do, I know not. If I go away in search of them, I may only be the means of incurring fresh danger!"

"Why not stay here," said Maud, "and await their coming?"

"I am afraid I cannot do better."

"Wait with patience. It may be that they will return in safety."

"I trust they may."

With such conversation and speculations as these, they waited away the time.

Presently their ears were saluted by a faint sound, which could not have reached their ears but for the intense stillness of the place.

Dick drew back yet further into the shadow of the trees, and listened.

The sound grew plainer, and its character soon became perceptible.

It was a rustling noise, as though someone or something was forcing a way through the dense undergrowth with which the ground, to a depth of a couple of feet, at least, was covered.

Someone was approaching.

But who?

That was a question which he could not determine, though he hoped to find it one of his companions.

He peered forth, at the same time taking care to keep himself concealed.

He could distinguish the sound of a horse's hoofs, but could not see either animal or rider.

Suddenly the sound ceased.

Still he could see nothing.

Wound up to the highest pitch of excitement, he listened.

He heard a voice say—

"I am back first, it seems, and I am a good deal behind my time. I hope they won't be long, or I shall be uneasy."

Dick felt as though he could shout for joy.

He knew the voice.

It was that of his old comrade, Tom King.

He whistled again, and then emerged from his place of concealment, leading Maud Gouldman by the hand.

His whistle was this time responded to by a cheerful cry, and the next moment Tom King alighted from his steed, and came hastening towards them.

But when Tom saw that Dick was accompanied by a lady, he shrunk back a little.

Turpin, however, advanced, and, grasping him by the hand, shook it warmly.

"I am back safe, you see, and have brought someone with me. You are surprised, no doubt, but this is Miss Maud Gouldman, to whom I have been fortunate enough to be of service, and she has rewarded me for what I have done by consenting to share my future lot."

Tom King looked astounded.

But he quickly recovered himself.

He had had his suspicions before upon the point, though he had never said a word about them, and now he saw them more than confirmed.

Tom King had received the education of a gentleman, and it was in quite a courtly way that he acknowledged Dick's introduction.

He raised his hat, and made a graceful and profound bow, after the manner of the times.

Maud Gouldman was surprised, although Dick had somewhat prepared her for those she had to meet, by describing their persons, manners, and history.

She was impressed in Tom King's favour immediately; and, indeed, his personal appearance was well qualified to produce such an effect.

But, as for our old friend, he looked upon her mistrustfully.

She vividly brought back to his mind the half-forgotten memories of the past.

He felt that he could never again trust a woman.

But no expression corresponding with this feeling was permitted to appear upon his countenance.

He turned towards Dick.

"I am rejoiced to see you safe back again," he said.

"You have no idea what anxiety we have suffered on account of your long absence."

"I can form a good notion of it. But, Claude and Jack—where are they? And where have you been? since, to my knowledge, you have only just returned to the chase."

"One question at a time, Dick—one at a time! After we parted from you, the night before last, we returned to the chase, and there met with a marvellous adventure, the particulars of which I will presently communicate to you."

"Well?"

"This adventure occupied us for some hours, and it was daybreak before we were aware of it. However, as soon as we made the discovery, we hastened off to this spot, expecting to find you here waiting for us."

"But you were disappointed?"

"We were. Well, we waited here until it got fully day, and then we imagined something or other had detained you, and we made up our minds to wait for night with what patience we could, for we did not expect you before then."

"Go on. You have not answered my question."

"I will in a moment. But, if you will just pay attention, you will understand all that has taken place."

"Very good."

"Having made up our minds, then, that you would not return until night, we retired to the chase to get a few hours' sleep, of which we stood greatly in need, as you will readily believe when I relate our strange adventure."

"You fill me with curiosity, Tom. I am at a loss to think what adventure you can have had."

"Never mind that, just at present; it will take too long to tell. We slept for several hours, and woke up a little before sunset. We then had something to eat, and by the time we had despatched our meal, we found that it was fairly night."

"What then?"

"We repaired once more to this spot, in the hope of seeing you shortly make your appearance. But in this hope we were disappointed, and at length we found it impossible to wait idly any longer."

"What did you do then?"

"We agreed to go in search of you."

"Just as I thought!"

"We could not rest here. Well, we got our horses, mounted them, and separated, each one of us taking a different road, and agreeing, whether successful in our search or not, to meet here as soon after daybreak as possible."

"I understand now."

"I thought you would. Of course, my search, like theirs, has been a fruitless one. I am glad to see you back, for if you had not been here when we returned, we should have run the risk of going to London."

"I was in dread that you had already done so; but, since you have not, all is well."

"As you say, all is well. In all my excursion, and I have been some miles, I have not met with a single living creature."

"So much the better. But where are Claude and Jack?"

"That is a question I can answer no better than yourself. You know the agreement we made with each other when we parted. I suppose they have gone further than they were aware, and found it impossible to return at the appointed hour. I was myself somewhat late for that very reason."

"Yes, it was daybreak when we arrived, and we had been waiting here some time when we heard the sounds of your approach."

"Of course, you did not know who I was?"

"Of course not, and hence my caution. But, hark!"

"Some one approaches."

"Claude or Jack?"

"That I do not know."

"It will be no harm to stand aside and reconnoitre."

"Certainly not. Let us do so."

All three once more betook themselves to the shelter which the trees afforded them.

It was a horse approaching, and it stopped somewhere about the same spot as Tom had a little while before.

In another moment there was a low whistle.

"That is Claude," said Tom King, in a whisper, as he replied to the signal.

They then emerged from their concealment, and found Tom to be quite correct.

It was Claude Duval who had just arrived.

His delight at seeing Dick safe back again can easily be imagined by the reader without our describing it.

He was much struck with the beauty of Maud Gouldman, whom he treated with more respect than he would any princess; and Claude Duval always bore the character of being the "gentleman highwayman."

Ere they had time to do little more than exchange greetings, Tom King espied Sixteen-String Jack at a little distance.

He was making his way for the spot upon which they stood, and would arrive in another moment.

Our friends were thus happily reunited, though fate destined that it should not be for long.

Every face bore a light-hearted, happy expression, and to have looked at them just then, no one, not knowing them, would have dreamed what they were.

On foot, they all turned towards the chase, and plunged into its leafy recesses.

Each led his own steed by the bridle.

On their way, Tom King related to Turpin and Maud their adventure with the wounded poacher.

When Dick learned what had occasioned his death—namely, that mantraps were laid about—he felt a pang of alarm and apprehension.

He stopped short in a moment.

But his comrades assured him that they had carefully examined the route they were about to take, and were quite confident that there was no fear of mantraps.

Thus reassured, Turpin ventured forward again; but his companions could not avoid noticing the extreme caution he observed at every step he took.

But it was not for his own safety that he was anxious, but for Maud's.

The secret of the existence of the cavern was now communicated to him, and he was also told that that was the place of their destination.

This was welcome intelligence indeed to Dick, for he had been wondering where he could find a shelter for his fair companion.

He trusted the cavern was a comfortable place, and fit for habitation, and he questioned his comrades closely upon the subject; but they could afford him but little information, having made only a casual examination of the place.

They told him how a soft, gentle light, in some way or other, managed to make a way into it; and that circumstance filled him with hopes that it would prove a comfortable place.

CHAPTER CCCLXX.

CLAUDE DUVAL, TOM KING, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK
SET OUT UPON AN IMPORTANT EXPEDITION.

In a few minutes now they reached the face of the rocks in which the concealed cavern was.

Dick Turpin and Maud Gouldman both looked around them with surprise, interest, and curiosity.

Especially was the mind of the latter filled with these feelings.

To her, all that she saw, and all that was taking place, had the ineffable charm of novelty.

All accorded, too, with her own romantic disposition, and she gazed upon the lofty trees, and the rugged surface of the rocks, with inconceivable delight.

She would not have changed her position for a home in the noblest and grandest mansion in the land.

There are some minds which are so constituted,

But to nearly all, we fancy, there must be a great charm about leading a primitive life in some vast forest.

If so, it is very natural, for such originally was the state of man.

Dick's three companions had well marked the appearance of the particular thorn-bush which hid the entrance of the cave, and they were able, without the least difficulty, to distinguish it from the others that grew near it.

Claude caught hold of the top of the bush, and pulled it down.

He kept it in that position by placing his foot upon it. In the meantime his comrades had removed all the trappings from their steeds.

They carried them just inside the passage, and piled them up in a little angular recess, which was admirably adapted for their reception.

The horses were then left at liberty to feed on the rich herbage that abounded there.

They were not afraid of their straying far away.

When this was done, they all entered the passage, with the exception of Claude Duval.

This place was in total darkness, so Tom King lighted one of the torches they had made use of for the previous occasion.

When this was done, Claude entered, and replaced the thorn-bush; taking care to do so in such a manner as to defy detection.

A few minutes enabled them to reach the termination of the gloomy passage, and then they emerged into the cavern.

Here the torch was not only unnecessary, but useless; and so Tom extinguished it, and thus got rid of an incumbrance.

Outside the cavern it was now broad daylight.

Looking up to the roof, from which the light manifestly proceeded, our friends found, after a little attention, that their conjecture was perfectly correct.

They were just able to detect numberless small crevices in the rock; and it was through these that the daylight made its way in a kind of misty radiance.

Upon gaining the cavern, Dick's first impulse, after having looked up to the roof, was to ascertain, if possible, the size and extent of it.

There was not much difficulty about doing this, for the whole of it was thoroughly illuminated; and, as their eyes got more and more accustomed to the subdued light, they were able to distinguish even the minutest object.

The cavern was in shape somewhat circular—it approached this form more nearly than any other.

At a rough estimate, its diameter in its widest part was about fifty feet, and in its narrowest thirty.

The height was a hundred, or perhaps more.

The walls of the cavern were in many places covered with some kind of glittering ore, which reflected the rays of light with a remarkably beautiful effect.

From the roof depended numerous stalactites, some of which were only a few feet in length, while others were so long as to reach the floor, and had the appearance of being natural supporting pillars.

But this was only in appearance.

The floor of this cavern was composed of some kind of hard earth, and this seemed to be the only thing that was artificial about the place, and even this might have been natural.

Such were the most prominent characteristics of this remarkable place.

Upon looking about them more closely, however, the highwaymen found several indications of the place having, at some time or other, been inhabited.

In one part of the floor was fixed a large flat stone, and

upon this there still remained the extinct embers of a wood fire.

Then, pushed into a kind of recess, of which there seemed to be a great number all round, were a table and some seats, all roughly made with the rudest of materials, and yet competent to perform the service required of them.

Our friends were glad of these necessities, which would so materially conduce to their comfort, should they think of remaining long.

Having found these articles in a recess, prompted them to renew their search in the remainder.

They resolved to go regularly round the cavern, and take each one in its turn as it presented itself.

Ere they had gone many paces, they came to a very large deerskin, which was hung up on the wall of the cavern.

Thinking there might be something behind this, Dick took hold of it and pulled it aside.

An opening in the wall was now disclosed.

Looking in, they saw a small chamber, about ten feet square, which seemed to be lighted in the same manner as the outer cavern.

But what immediately attracted Turpin's attention was a dark-looking mass of something in one corner.

He strode towards it in a moment, in order to ascertain its character.

He found it to be a great many deerskins, all laid perfectly flat, and one on the top of the other.

The use of this was obvious at a glance.

It was, indeed, to serve as a couch, and no doubt it would make a very soft one.

Highly pleased with this discovery, they left the little chamber, and on making the circuit of the cavern they were astonished to find seven more chambers of a similar character, and all furnished with skins in the same manner.

This promised them something better in the shape of sleeping accommodation than they had had lately.

All were now quite in high spirits.

"I believe we shall be able to live here like merry men," exclaimed Dick Turpin. "There seems to be almost every convenience we can require."

"There does indeed, and we ought to feel glad we have got so secure a place where we can stay until our last affair blows over a little."

It was Tom King who said this, but Claude added—

"It would do for a time, no doubt, but you would find being here terribly dull. Indeed, I have found it so already."

"Yea," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but why should we not take permanent possession of this place, and make sallies from it whenever we think proper?"

"That sounds better," rejoined Claude Duval.

"You feel the want of some employment, Claude, do you not?" said Dick.

"I do, and that's just it."

"I thought so. Now, I have a little expedition for all of you, if you think proper to undertake it."

"You are our captain. Command, and we obey!"

"Very good, if you like to look upon it in that light."

"What is it to be?"

"Do not be so impatient."

"But I can't help it."

"Why, you have only just come back from one expedition."

"Very true; but I met no one. I had nothing but a solitary ride."

"Well, then, this is what I want you to do."

Dick Turpin whispered something in Claude's ear.

He looked amazed for a moment, and then he said—

"All right, captain. It shall be done."

"What—what?" asked his comrades, eagerly.

"He shall tell you presently," said Turpin.

"Shall we start at once?" asked Claude.

"What do you think?"

"It's daylight."

"So it is."

"I think we had better wait till dark."

"Agreed; there will be much less danger then."

"You are right, captain."

Here the subject dropped, but Claude was obliged to whisper in the ears of Tom and Jack what Turpin had said to him.

As they became the recipients of the intelligence, their countenances for a moment expressed the same amount of astonishment as his had.

At any rate, nothing was to be done till night, and that was far distant, the day having only just begun.

They occupied their time making several preparations.

Fuel was brought in, and a fire made up on the hearth, for the season was far advanced, and the cavern was chilly.

A dense volume of smoke arose from the fire, and then our friends thought they had done a very injudicious thing.

The smoke would make its way out of the numerous crevices in the roof of which we have spoken, and should anyone happen to pass by a discovery must take place.

There was, however, but little fear of any one visiting that unfrequented spot, and yet such a thing might happen at the most inopportune moment.

In order to set this point at rest, they all resolved to leave the cave, and get upon the roof of it, if such a thing was at all practicable.

On emerging from the cave, their first care was to take accurate note of the bearings of different objects; and, having done this, they proceeded to ascend to the top of the rocks.

In order to do this, they had to make a considerable detour.

At length, however, they were convinced they stood upon what was the roof of the cavern.

The smoke was imperceptible, and so, too, were the crevices through which the daylight penetrated.

These latter were so small, and so overgrown with dense vegetation as to be quite invisible, unless the closest search was made.

And, even then, they seemed nothing more than cracks and fissures in the rock, through which it was impossible to see down into the cavern.

Then, as for the smoke, the only way they could account for not being able to see that was that, by ascending to so great a height, it was converted into an impalpable vapour before it reached the surface.

In order to set the point at rest, several coins were dropped through the crevices.

Upon re-entering the cavern, these coins were all found lying upon the floor of it.

The highwaymen now experienced a feeling of the greatest security with respect to the secrecy of their strange habitation.

The more they found out about it, and the better they became acquainted with it, the more they liked it.

By this time the fire had burned up, and was quite clear, and the next thing to be thought about was a meal.

This they set about having in their usual primitive fashion, and here it was they experienced the full benefit of Maud's presence among them.

The meal was served up with the best of all sauces, and that was a keen and vigorous appetite.

It was wonderful to see how soon all adapted themselves to their new quarters, and began to feel quite at home.

When the meal was over, some hours were spent in cheerful conversation, in which the various actions of the past were fully discussed.

Presently, however, Dick Turpin's three comrades withdrew.

They had recollected something which they had promised to do, but which had been forgotten until the present moment.

The reader will perhaps guess what it was.

It was to bury the remains of the poacher to whose confession they were indebted for the comfortable habitation they had got.

There was something abhorrent to the feelings of all three of them in the thought that his inanimate remains should become the prey of the wild denizens of the forest.

A very little trouble on their parts would prevent it.

This, then, was the reason they withdrew, leaving Turpin and Maud in the cavern, who probably did not much regret the circumstance of being left alone.

The body of the dead poacher was but a few paces from the entrance to the cave, so Tom and his two comrades quickly reached it.

They found that the carrion crows had already begun

their feast, and they had some difficulty in scaring the loathsome birds away.

They were but ill-provided with tools requisite for digging a grave, but for such a thing as that it was not likely they would hold back.

With the aid of their swords and some fragments of wood, they succeeded in making a hole large enough and deep enough for their purpose.

In this they placed the body of the poacher, which already presented a terrible spectacle.

The earth was shovelled in and hammered down hard. By the time this was done they were surprised to find that darkness was rapidly closing in around them.

But winter was very close at hand, and the days were short.

Returning to the cave, they signified to Dick their intention of setting out at once upon their little expedition.

To this he made no demur; but, on the contrary, pressed them to be as speedy as possible, and not to return on any account until their object was accomplished.

To these terms they consented; and, pleased with the idea of having some business on hand—and business, too, in which they felt a peculiar interest—they set out with light hearts.

Their steeds were saddled, and Maud and Dick accompanied them to the outskirts of the chase, where they bade them adieu.

What was the nature of the business upon which they were engaged, and what sort of success they met with, we shall very quickly see.

CHAPTER CCCLXXI.

RELATES WHAT BEFEL THE THREE HIGHWAYMEN UPON THEIR MYSTERIOUS EXPEDITION.

WHEN the three highwaymen left Enfield Chase, it was not quite night, though darkness was fast approaching and increasing.

Objects at a short distance were invisible, and a general gloom overspread the whole of the landscape.

The night offered a remarkable contrast to the preceding one, which had been so unusually bright and beautiful.

Now, however, the heavens were entirely covered with one dense, sad-coloured cloud, which permitted not a glimpse of the blue ether to be obtained through the smallest rift in the whole of its vast expanse.

So far, too, from the moon pouring down upon the earth a flood of bright and beautiful light, her position in the heavens could not even be distinguished.

To our friends, though, and the expedition they were upon, this night was unusually favourable.

In a short time their eyes became accustomed to the insufficient illumination, and they were able to see their path with the greatest ease.

Ere they had gone a hundred yards, however, they drew rein, and as well as could be distinguished in the darkness, looked at each other irresolutely.

It was Claude who broke the silence.

"My friends," he said, "I have already acquainted you with the nature of the business we have to carry out to-night, but the subject requires some little consideration. In the first place, the question arises, where are we to look for our destination?"

"That sounds a strange question, Claude," replied Tom King, "but I perfectly well understand what you mean. I am not able to answer you, but perhaps Jack is."

"Well, yes, I am," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Where—where?"

"As I was out early this morning, on the look-out for Dick, I saw just the place we want."

"Did you indeed?"

"Yes."

"But did you notice its position well enough to be able to find your way back to it in the dark?"

"I think so, for I maintained the same direction all the time."

"That will do, then," said Tom King. "It is lucky you noticed it, for I saw nothing of the kind, I am certain."

"Nor I," said Claude Duval.

"Never mind, all is well. Just bear round a little to

the left-hand, then you will come to the high road; keep along it, and you will soon be where you want to be."

"Have you got what I asked you to provide yourself with?" asked Claude Duval.

"Yes," answered Sixteen-String Jack; and, as he spoke, he patted a little bundle of something, which he had got strapped before him on the saddle.

"That's all right enough, then, and we can look upon the whole of the business as settled."

"I hope we may. I have been engaged in many a strange adventure before to-day, but never in one half so strange and curious as this."

"The same here," exclaimed the two others; and, as they spoke, they turned their horses' heads in the direction of which Sixteen-String Jack had spoken.

There was now a silence of some minutes' duration, but it was broken by Claude Duval, who, addressing Tom King, said—

"What do you think of this last affair of Dick's?"

"You mean about Maud Gouldman?"

"Yes."

"Why, taking all things together, I am sorry it happened."

"Are you?"

"Yes; and if I do not mistake, you are of the same opinion as myself."

"Well, Tom, I am."

"So am I," said Jack.

"Then we are all quite unanimous upon the point," continued Claude.

"Well, I don't wonder at it. You see it will upset everything, and let you look at the matter in what way you will, it presents a disagreeable aspect."

"True; and for that reason I think we ought to make the best of it we can."

"We cannot alter it, that is very certain."

"Of course it is; then, in my judgment, the best thing we can do is to submit to the change with the best grace we can."

"We must try to do so; though it strikes me we shall find it very disagreeable."

"Well, if so, we must put up with it, that's all. But here we are at the high road at last."

The three highwaymen leaped the low wooden paling which skirted the meadows they had been crossing, and alighted in the high road.

"Now follow me," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and I will lead the way. But we have some distance before us, I can tell you that."

"Never mind; our cattle are thoroughly refreshed by the rest they have had. Forward! forward!"

At a sharp trot, which got over the ground in a really amazing manner, they took their way along the high road.

Their horses' hoofs made a tremendous clatter, which made conversation too difficult to be pleasant; and, as they had nothing more to talk about than the expedition they were upon, they were silent.

Each, however, busied himself with his own thoughts; and, unconsciously, they all dwelt at the same moment upon the same topic.

And that was about the advent of Maud Gouldman, and the changes which were likely to result from it.

In this way they continued for a long distance—until, indeed, the winter evening had deepened into night. The air was raw and cold.

The whole atmosphere seemed to be loaded with dampness, and nothing but the strongest necessity would have induced ordinary travellers to be abroad.

But the highwaymen paid little attention to the inclemency of the weather.

During the whole of their journey they had scarcely met with a single individual, and they had not passed a vehicle of any description.

The road was a lonely one, and at such an hour, and in such unfavourable weather, it was deserted entirely.

Sixteen-String Jack continued to lead the way without the slightest hesitation, and his friends followed him with the most implicit faith in his power to guide them.

At length they reached a small village, which straggled for some distance along the high road.

What was the name of it they had no idea.

Passing through it, however, without perceiving a single inhabitant, they kept on for about a quarter of a mile further, and here they halted.

"Is this the place, Jack?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Look yonder!"

Sixteen-String Jack raised his riding-whip as he spoke, and pointed to what appeared to be the square tower of a church.

As soon as his friends perceived it, they said—

"Oh! yes, this must be right. Have we much further to go?"

"I suppose not, but I cannot precisely lead the way; for, when I passed this spot this morning, I was going at a rapid rate, and did little more than cast a hasty glance around me."

"We must approach and reconnoitre."

"We must. Come this way quietly."

The three now took their way across the road; and, after a piece of information will be valuable in the extreme to us."

This showed that the building to which Jack had pointed was no other than a church. Indeed, they could now perceive the dim outline of the ancient sacred edifice.

"I should think this churchyard would be a good place to leave the horses while we do our business; that is, if we can get into it pretty easily."

"Go on a little further. You are almost sure to come to a gate."

They did so, and quickly discovered one of those white gates which, in country places, so often open into the graveyards.

This gate was simply secured by a ponderous iron latch, and this Claude raised with very little difficulty, and the party fairly entered the churchyard.

They dismounted, and led their horses by the bridle until they reached an alder-tree, which grew at the junction of the two broad paths intersecting the churchyard.

To this they secured their cattle, though in such a manner as allowed them liberty to graze.

This done, they paused, and endeavoured to pierce the darkness which surrounded them.

In this attempt they were unsuccessful.

But, luckily for them, the clouds just at that moment parted, and, through a long straggling rift in them, the moon shone sweetly down.

Her rays seemed all the brighter in consequence of the darkness which had hitherto prevailed, and which was now completely dissipated.

Those objects which had before been invisible were now distinctly revealed.

The massive square tower of the church could now be seen, even from a considerable distance; and, in addition to this, something which instantly attracted the attention of the highwaymen.

This was a stone building, contiguous to the church, and, from its position, doubtless the residence of the vicar.

They pointed this house out to each other in a manner which plainly indicated that the business they were upon was in some way connected with it.

With hasty steps they crossed the churchyard, and went straight towards it.

A small gate separated the garden of the vicarage—for such it was—from the church; and this the highwaymen opened, and passed through.

The front door was reached by a flight of broad and handsome stone steps, and it was surmounted by a portico of great solidity and beauty.

No notice was as yet taken of the intrusion of our friends, who looked up at the various windows of the dwelling before them, in order to ascertain whether a light appeared at any of them.

But all was dark, which seemed to indicate that the inhabitants had all retired to rest.

The highwaymen were not satisfied of this, however, until they had looked all round the building; having done which, they returned to the front, and took up their former position.

And now the moon, who by her light had rendered them such good service, was again completely obscured by the clouds.

For this they cared not, as they had already performed all the service which lay in their power.

In a whisper, however, Claude spoke—

"There is one piece of information which it is very desirable we should be in possession of."

"What?"

"The name of the parson."

"But how are we to find that out?"

"There's the difficulty."

"Stop."

"What?"

"I know how we can find it out."

"How?"

"By going to the door of the church. Don't you know that the name is always painted there on a board?"

"Of course it is. I might have thought of that myself."

"Make haste, it will not take us a moment; and such a piece of information will be valuable in the extreme to us."

Being of this opinion, they hastily left the garden in front of the vicarage, and re-entered the churchyard.

It was easy enough to go straight up to the porch, and, having arrived there, they felt about for the position of the notice-board.

Having found it, Tom King lighted a thief's match.

He fancied this would burn just long enough to answer his purpose, and so it did.

They saw the name, and managed to make it out, though the letters were half effaced.

Being in possession of the name of the parson, they returned to the garden.

They were now ready for action.

Sixteen-String Jack had removed the bundle from the front of his saddle, and he held it under his arm.

What its character was could not be distinguished.

With stealthy tread the three highwaymen ascended the little flight of stone steps in front of the vicarage, and stood close to the door.

At a sign, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval retired behind one of the pillars, where they were completely out of sight.

No sooner was this done than Tom King seized the knocker, and banged away with right good will.

The hollow sound reverberated through the dwelling, but no immediate notice appeared to be taken of it.

In consequence of this, Tom, after pausing a moment, renewed the assault, and this time with a vigour that was really terrific.

Ere he had ceased, one of the upper windows was violently thrown open.

The swinging leaf of the lattice went back with a crash against the wall, and the clattering of broken glass followed.

Tom looked up, and in the imperfect light, he could just distinguish the white night-capped head of someone.

Whoever this individual was, he appeared to see our friends, for he instantly called out—

"Who's there? What do you want?"

The tones of the voice were angry and insolent.

"Is that the Reverend Mr. Martext?" asked Tom King, in a voice of well-affected grief and concern.

"What if it is?"

"If it is, reverend sir, although I am very sorry to trouble you at such an unreasonable hour, I must ask you to come and see my brother. He lies even now at the point of death, and is sadly in want of you, holy sir, to administer spiritual consolation to him."

"Who is your brother, eh?"

"A stranger to you, I have no doubt, reverend sir," said Tom King, still keeping up, with consummate skill, the peculiar tone of voice he had assumed.

The parson hesitated.

He was not fond of being called up of a night after having gone to bed.

Tom continued—

"You will only have a few yards to go, reverend sir, and, with your permission, I will lead the way. My brother is dying, and he so earnestly requests to see you that I do hope you will not refuse."

Mr. Martext, the parson, was completely deceived by this statement of Tom King's, and no suspicion of its genuineness once crossed his imagination.

Nevertheless, could he have got out of the job of having to leave his home at that hour of the night, he would gladly have done so.



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ARE ATTACKED BY THE SERPENT IN THE CAVERN.]

But he could not.

He knew his position in the parish too well to dream of refusing.

Should he do so, the fact would, of course, become public, as all disagreeable facts are sure to do, and the result would be considerably to his prejudice.

So he resolved, after a moment of hesitation, to visit this dying man, and he called out to that effect from the window.

But, as the reader will not fail to have observed, it was not from any desire to smoothe the passage of a dying soul from this world to the next that he gave his consent, but merely from a selfish feeling.

It would not do, in a worldly sense, for him to refuse.

He closed the window, however, with very angry and unchristian-like feelings about his heart, and commenced attiring himself.

The sufferings he presently underwent seemed almost like a species of retribution.

It is quite certain he fully deserved the punishment he met with.

He was not long putting on all his clothes, and, as soon as he was dressed, he descended to the front door.

The night was cold, and he was seized with sudden fits of shivering.

He put the lamp down on a little side-table in the hall, and undid the fastenings of the door.

He opened it and passed out.

Tom ascended the steps, and came towards him.

Seeing he was there, the parson closed the door.

He advanced to the top of the flight of stone steps, and there he paused.

"Now," he said, "how far do you want me to go? Where is your brother? and who is he? Answer these questions, or I won't go a step further. I don't know you."

"Mr. Martext," said Tom, in the same assumed voice,

"my brother is a stranger to you, but the distance you will have to go to find him will be very short."

"Where is it?" asked the parson, angrily, about whose heart strange suspicions began to gather.

"Close at hand," said Tom. "Close at hand, I assure you."

"Then I shan't go, for I don't like your looks. Ha!" This last was a sudden ejaculation of surprise.

The parson tried to turn round, and rush back into his house.

But he was too late.

He had suffered himself to be ensnared before the suspicion that anything wrong was taking place had entered his mind.

What had happened we will now proceed to relate.

CHAPTER CCCLXXII.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MARRIAGE OF DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN IN THE GLADE IN ENFIELD CHASE.

WHEN Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval, at a sign from Tom King, had slipped behind one of the pillars of the portico and concealed themselves, the latter took the bundle from under his arm and unfolded it.

It fluttered down, and, as he held his hands before him, reached to his feet.

But what it was, the darkness of the place in which he stood did not allow it to be seen.

In this way they waited during the little dialogue which took place between Tom and the parson.

As soon as they were aware of the result of it, they prepared themselves for action.

They heard the door opened, and dimly saw the figure of the parson cross the threshold and advance to the head of the steps.

As soon as he had done this, they glided from their place of concealment as noiselessly as two specters.

The parson never suspected who was behind him.

Cautiously, silently, and slowly they drew nearer and nearer to him while the little conversation took place between him and Tom King, which was purposely prolonged by the latter, in order to give his comrades proper time to achieve their design.

It was a bold and novel one.

Having stationed themselves behind the parson, both highwaymen took hold of the mysterious object which Sixteen-String Jack had carried rolled up like a bundle.

It could then be seen what it was.

It was a sack, and one of rather unusual dimensions.

Claude and Jack had hold of it near the mouth.

The ejaculation which came so promptly from the parson's lips was caused by his suddenly finding the upper part of his body enveloped in the sack, which Claude and Jack had drawn over his head.

To use a common expression, "before he knew where he was," the sack was slipped down as far as his feet.

In vain he struggled.

In vain he tried to turn round, and gain the secure asylum which his home afforded him.

He was lifted off his feet with bewildering rapidity.

At first he was totally at a loss to think what had happened to him, and the agony of uncertainty which he experienced was something terrible.

He struck out wildly with his arms, and plunged madly with his feet.

But he did not achieve his freedom thereby.

He was lifted up by Claude and Jack.

The mouth of the sack was firmly secured by Tom King.

Parson Martext was then a complete prisoner, and wholly in the power of his captors, for them to do with him as they might think fit.

A position in which he was less capable of helping himself could scarcely be imagined.

He could not see what was going on, or judge by the expression of his captors' countenances what sort of fate was destined for him.

What strange and terrible thoughts swept like a diabolical phantasmagoria through the brain of the unfortunate parson when he found himself in this inexplicable situation, no tongue can tell.

He made up his mind, however, that his doom would be death at least.

One would have thought, from his occupation, and the doctrines he enunciated when standing unthreatened by the least prospect of danger in his pulpit, that death would have presented few terrors to him.

But such was proved to be anything but the case.

A most abject fear took possession of him, and he shook like one afflicted with the ague.

He tried to command his voice sufficiently to implore the mercy of his captors, but his tongue refused to do his bidding.

In the meantime, the sack, having been properly secured, Claude Duval took hold of it at one end and Sixteen-String Jack at the other.

Tom King then led the way across the garden and through the churchyard, and, in a few minutes, the highwaymen emerged into the lane.

The parson was deposited on the ground while the highwaymen regained possession of their horses.

It was while he lay thus that Parson Martext became aware of the fact that the mysterious object in which he was confined was nothing more nor less than a sack.

But this discovery in no way enlightened him as to the motives for which he had thus been made a prisoner, nor did it tend to remove in the slightest degree the apprehensions under which he suffered.

Before he had time to make any further reflections, the three highwaymen arrived with their horses.

Parson Martext heard them pause.

He heard them whisper to each other.

But he could not distinguish the words they uttered, for they spoke in a very low tone of voice.

"It won't do for us to ride straight off now we have got him," said Tom King. "I daresay he knows every trick and turn about the place, and, if so, in spite of his being in the sack, he will find out where we take him to."

"What shall be done?"

"That is a point well worthy of consideration."

"We must decide quickly."

"Oh! certainly. The less time we lose, the better. What do you propose?"

"I don't know."

"The thing we want to do is, to thoroughly confuse him, and cause him to lose all idea of whereabouts he is—supposing him to have any idea upon the subject."

"Just so."

"Well, how is it to be done?"

"I have an idea," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"What is it? Let us hear it once," exclaimed his comrades.

"You know, when they play at blind man's buff, they always make the one whose eyes are bandaged turn round several times?"

"Of course they do."

"And what do they do it for?"

"To confuse his ideas, and make him uncertain in which direction his face is turned."

"Exactly. You have hit it. Now, this is what we want to do with the parson."

"It is. But, then, how are we to make him turn round in the manner you mention?"

"I confess, at first sight, that seems very difficult; but, as I don't see why we need be very particular with him, I think it may easily be got over."

"How?"

"Why, we will so turn, and roll, and bundle him about, that he will no more know where he is than if he had been suddenly put down in the moon."

"Bravo! That will do."

These last words were spoken rather more loudly than those which preceded them, and the consequence was, they reached the over-strained ears of Parson Martext, who immediately put upon them the most terrible signification.

He thought they must allude to his murder.

No sooner had they come to the decision we have recorded, than they at once set about putting it into execution.

The first thing they did was to pick up the bag at both ends, and then to run round and round in a circle with it, as though for a wager, to the parson's great amazement, who found this circumstance more inexplicable than the others.

He soon grew giddy, and sick, and faint; but, heedless of that, the gyratory movement was continued.

Suddenly, however, they stopped, and then ran round in the opposite direction to that which they had taken before.

This lasted for a few moments, and then, deeming the unfortunate prisoner not sufficiently bewildered, they made him stand upon his feet.

This, however, he was scarcely capable of doing, and he was only prevented from falling by the following means.

The three highwaymen stood round him in a triangle, and near enough for them to be within arm's-length of their prey.

First Claude would seize him by the arm, or some other portion of his body, and give him a whirl round.

Then, before he could fall to the ground, he would be seized by Tom King, who would whirl him round in precisely the same manner, and then pass him on to Sixteen-String Jack.

Thus the parson was knooped about from one to the other of them, until at length they ceased, for they were completely tired.

He sank breathless and exhausted on the ground, and incapable of making the slightest movement.

It was while he was in this state that Mr. Martext was lifted up on Tom King's horse, which happened to be the strongest animal of the three.

The manner in which he was placed upon it was anything but an agreeable one.

He was laid across the withers of the horse, just as a sack of corn might be.

Tom got up and sat behind him in the saddle.

He grasped the sack with one hand in such a manner that it could not possibly fall off, and then held the reins in the other.

The order to advance was now given, and off they set at a canter which jolted Mr. Martext about in a terrible manner.

After going for some distance, Tom King relinquished his burden to Claude Duval, who, in his turn, passed it to Sixteen-String Jack.

Thus taking it in turns, they at length reached Enfield Chase.

Their design had been to thoroughly baffle and bewilder the parson, and this they succeeded to the fullest extent in doing.

Whether he had gone north, east, west, or south, he had not the remotest notion.

The pleasant little dell where they had first halted on entering the chase, and which had so often been a rendezvous, was the point to which the highwaymen directed their steps, for it was here they had agreed to meet Dick; and, from the length of time they had necessarily been absent, they fully expected to find him.

Nor were they mistaken.

Immediately upon their arrival at the sweet sylvan spot which the moonbeams now lighted up, for the dense clouds had dispersed, they saw Dick and Maud emerge from the shadow of the trees, to which they had retired upon hearing their approach, in order to be quite certain it was their friends before they made themselves visible.

With all speed the highwaymen alighted, and Parson Martext, still enveloped in the sack, was laid upon the ground.

The horses were led away, and a few words passed between Dick and his companions.

The result of it was that Dick withdrew with Maud for a little while to some distance.

He was to return to the dell upon receiving a signal from his comrades.

In the meantime they made themselves very busy indeed.

A small empty cask, which had served them for a seat, was placed on end upon a level piece of ground.

Then they proceeded to untie the bag and release their prisoner.

When the sack was removed, they were somewhat alarmed to perceive that the parson lay quite still, without exhibiting the least signs of life.

Conjecturing, however, that he had merely fainted, Claude Duval fished some water from the natural basin into which the mimic waterfall fell, and pleasantly besprinkled him with it.

He was quickly rewarded for his trouble by seeing the apparently defunct parson stretch forth his arms and open his eyes.

Observing these signs of recovery, the administration of a little spirit was next resorted to, and it was wonderful to see what a revivifying effect a small quantity of it produced.

In a few minutes they had him thoroughly restored to consciousness.

It was some time before the reverend gentleman could recall to his mind the occurrences of the past.

He glared round him with mingled surprise and curiosity.

He was quite at a loss to think to what place he had been conveyed, for the trees by which he was surrounded possessed no distinctive character by which he could recognise them.

As soon as he had partially recovered from his state of mental confusion, Tom King addressed him.

The sound of his voice had the effect of bringing all that had happened full before the recollection of the parson, and again he was seized with the horrible fear that he was destined for some terrible death, which had formerly possessed him.

Perceiving this, and the great extent of his fright, Tom endeavoured to reassure him.

"Fear nothing," he said; "your life and body are in no danger. Do you comprehend that you are in no danger?"

The parson opened and shut his eyes in a wild and convulsive manner, and made several ineffectual attempts to speak.

He made several pantomimic gestures with his arms.

"I say again," repeated Tom King, observing the effect his former words had upon him, "I say again, you are in no danger. I tell you, once more, that your life is safe, but only upon certain conditions."

"Conditions?" repeated the parson, at length being able to speak.

"Yes, conditions. Your life will be spared, and your person carefully preserved from all harm, if you do exactly as you are told. But the moment you refuse, or even hesitate, to do what is commanded, that moment will be your last, and you will be handed over to a terrible fate."

"Oh! good gentlemen," said Parson Martext, rising to his knees, for he now began to find that his situation was not so bad as he had thought it—"Oh! good gentlemen, spare my life, pray spare my miserable life, and I will do anything you ask; indeed I will. Try me, gentlemen! I will do anything you ask, if you will but spare my life."

"That is well," said Tom King. "In the first place, then, you must swear—"

"Oh! yes, gentlemen. Contrary to the regulations of my profession as it may be, and unseemly as it may appear, yet, to save my life, I will even swear. D—n you all! D—n me for a fool! D—n all the world!"

Our three friends could not control their laughter at this ludicrous interruption; for, of course the sort of swearing in which the reverend gentleman indulged was not the kind that Tom King required, and as he would have found if he had only had patience enough to allow him to finish what he was about to say.

They judged, however, from this that the parson was rapidly recovering from the abject fear with which he had been possessed, and this was really the case.

Tom King, however, spoke to him with some severity.

"You must swear," he said, "not to reveal to a living soul any of the events of this to-night you may be a witness. A solemn oath will presently be proposed to you, which, if you refuse to take, you will that instant cease to exist; for we are desperate men, and should think no more of taking your life than we should of taking a sparrow's."

"I will take any oath you like to propose to me, gentlemen," said the parson; "but, oh! spare my life—spare my life."

"You will be uninjured if you will consent to the terms I have proposed. Am I to understand that you do so?"

"Yes, yes, gentlemen. Anything to spare my life."

"Very well, then. Listen."

"I am listening, merciful sir."

"You have been brought here to-night to perform the marriage ceremony upon two persons between whom no legitimate impediment exists."

"Anything but that, good sir. Ask me anything but

that, and I will obey you. But I cannot do that. Indeed, I cannot."

"Then prepare yourself for instant death."

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Have mercy on yourself. You have been brought here for the express purpose of solemnizing a marriage, and, if you refuse to do it, you die at once."

"But, good sir, pray reflect."

"There is neither time nor need for reflection. I tell you, again, you have these two alternatives, and the choice you make depends upon yourself."

"But if, as you say, there exists no legitimate impediment why these two persons should not be joined together, why do they not in a proper manner present themselves at a church?"

"There are good reasons why such a thing is impossible; and with those reasons you have nothing whatever to do. Decide! Will you perform the ceremony, or will you die at once?"

As he spoke these words in a very determined manner, Tom King took out of his pocket a pistol, which he loaded, primed, and cocked.

The parson watched his every movement with an intention that was really ludicrous to witness.

Advancing close up to him, Tom King thrust the muzzle of the pistol rather roughly in his ear, as he said—

"I shall count three, and if you do not consent then, the moment I pronounce the word three, I shall pull the trigger, and your brains will be scattered upon the sword."

The contact of the muzzle of the pistol had a remarkable effect upon the parson.

There was no doubting that Tom would carry out the intention he had expressed; and then, as for the pistol, he knew that the slightest pressure on the trigger would do the business—for he had seen it loaded with his own eyes.

In a screaming voice he cried out—

"Oh! yes, gentlemen. I will do it; I will do it. Anything to spare my life."

"Agreed," said Tom, as he removed the pistol. "Believe me, you have chosen wisely, for I should not have hesitated to keep my word."

"I shall be ruined through it, though."

"Pho—pho!"

"It is against the express orders of the bishop."

"Oh! bother the bishop."

"It's all very well for you to say, bother the bishop! You are independent of him, and I am not."

"That's very true. But I suppose you will only be ruined when the intelligence of what you have done reaches the bishop's ears?"

"No, not till then."

"All right, my friend; then you have nothing whatever to fear, for, of course, you would not be such a fool as to tell him yourself."

"No, I should not tell him."

"Then, you may rely upon it, the information will not reach his ears from any of our lips, for it will be to our interest to keep the matter a secret. So you need have no apprehensions on that score."

The clergyman smiled in a feeble and ghastly sort of way.

"Where are the bride and bridegroom?" he said.

"They are in waiting," said Tom King, "and will make their appearance as soon as ever we are in readiness. Now, let us have no further trouble. We shall keep a close watch upon you, and the moment you refuse or hesitate to obey us, you die!"

CHAPTER CCLXXXIII.

RELATES THE MANNER IN WHICH THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY WAS CELEBRATED BETWEEN DICK TUMPHSON AND MAUD GOULDMAN IN ENFIELD CHASE.

PARSON MARTEXT was now thoroughly subdued, and he prepared to resign himself to his fate with the best grace he was able to command.

Tom King looked round, and saw that his comrades had completed their preparations.

Mr. Martext still continued on his knees.

Tom took hold of his arm, as he said—

"Rise at once, and follow me."

With a groan, which he tried in vain to repress, the parson did his bidding.

Tom kept hold of his arm, and led him towards the spot where the cask had been placed.

"Do you see that?" he asked.

"Ye—es," stammered the parson, misgivingly.

"Well, then, mount it."

"Mount it?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Don't ask questions, but obey! You will stand upon it to perform the ceremony."

Mr. Martext had no resource but to submit.

With a very bad grace, he got upon the cask.

He was a little man, and, like most little men, had a very great idea of his own dignity and importance.

The head of the cask was only just large enough for him to stand upon, and he cut a rather ridiculous figure.

"Now," said Tom King, "stand perfectly still, as you value your life. Where is your prayer-book?"

As he heard this question, a gleam of hope shot across the parson's face.

He fancied that perhaps, after all, he should be able to escape the solemnization of the ceremony.

"I have no prayer-book," he said; "and, therefore, I cannot read the service."

This was an entirely unlooked-for obstacle.

The three highwaymen stared blankly at each other.

Mr. Martext ventured to smile.

Was their project after all to be defeated, at the very moment, too, when they had begun to felicitate themselves upon its speedy accomplishment?

It seemed so; for, as our readers may suppose, the highwaymen were not in the habit of carrying prayer-books about with them in their pockets.

The parson's smile expanded into a grin.

He saw the dilemma in which they were placed.

"I don't believe the rascal," said Claude Duval, at length. "We have only his word that he don't carry a prayer-book. Search his pockets, and see."

"Agreed."

Claude and Jack sprang forward, and, in spite of the resistance which he made, proceeded to search the parson's pockets.

"What's this?" asked Sixteen-String Jack.

He had taken hold of the parson's coat-tails, and his hand came in contact with some hard substance, which, from its shape, he felt certain must be a book.

He plunged his hand into his pocket.

His conviction was confirmed.

He drew forth a book.

"Now, then," he cried; "who would take the word of a parson?"

"I told you he was not to be believed," said Claude Duval.

"What do you mean by telling us such a deliberate falsehood?" said Tom King, angrily, addressing the parson. "Do you know you are playing with your life?"

"He deserves to forfeit it," cried Claude Duval, indignantly.

"He does, indeed."

"Mercy, gentlemen—mercy!" exclaimed Mr. Martext. "You promised to spare my life!"

"I know we did; and, in return for our mistaken clemency, you tell us a deliberate falsehood."

"No—no."

"Shame—shame!"

"No—no!" screamed the parson, again; "I haven't told you a falsehood."

"I say you have."

"But I haven't."

"Didn't you say that you could not perform the marriage ceremony, because you had not a prayer-book with you?"

"Yes, I did."

"You admit, then, that you told us a lie?"

"No—no!"

"But you must have done. Here is the book."

"No there isn't; that is not a prayer-book."

"Not a prayer-book?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"A hymn-book."

"Oh! d—n it!"

Sixteen-String Jack opened the book, and, by the aid of

the moon, saw that what was printed in it was divided into lines and verses, just as hymns would be.

The parson was doubtless right.

He had triumphed; and it was easy to see, by the expression of his countenance, that he enjoyed it.

But Claude Duval came to the rescue.

He was determined that they should not have all their trouble for nothing, if it could possibly be helped.

Turning towards Mr. Martext, he said—

"Now, sir, listen to me, and answer truthfully the questions which I shall propound."

"If you don't," exclaimed Tom King, "I'll blow your brains out!"

The stern tone in which these words were uttered made the parson's knees tremble under him.

"What is it you want to know?" he asked.

"How long have you held your present situation as parson?"

"How long?"

"Yes, how many years?"

"Nearly twenty."

"Oh! nearly twenty. Well, then, Mr. Martext, perhaps you will be good enough to inform us how many times during the twenty years you have performed the marriage service."

"I really cannot recollect."

"Why not?"

"Because I have performed it so many times."

"Exactly; that is just what I thought."

"Oh! is it?" said the parson, with a puzzled air.

He could not perceive to what point Claude's questions tended.

"Yes. But we will try if we cannot form some idea of the number of times. We shall not be particular to a few. Now, on an average, how many times do you read the marriage service in the course of a week?"

"On an average?"

"Yes. You understand what I mean by the term, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes."

"How many times, then?"

"Why, about three."

"No more?"

"No."

"How many times did you perform it during the past week?"

"Five times."

"That, then, is over the average?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well, we are bound to believe you. Just stop a minute, and you will discover the object of these questions. You say you have been parson for twenty years; and, on the average, have celebrated three marriages every week during that time?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. There are fifty-two weeks in every year. Three times fifty-two comes to—Let me see. I'll tell you directly. Three times fifty-two comes to exactly one hundred and fifty-six. Now, that number must be multiplied by twenty—the number of years, you know; and that gives three thousand one hundred and twenty."

"Quite correct," said Tom King.

"Now, Mr. Martext," continued Claude, "do you see the drift of my questions? If you don't, I'll soon make you. If you, by your own confession, have performed the marriage service over three thousand times, it is quite clear you must know it by heart; and, therefore, a prayer-book is superfluous. You can repeat the words just as well without one as with."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Claude's two comrades, clapping their hands with delight at the clever manner in which Claude had got the better of the parson.

"I forget it altogether," stammered the parson.

"Stuff!" cried Claude. "You don't expect we shall believe that, do you? You must know it off by heart."

"But I have a very bad memory."

"Then we will see if we cannot improve it."

"Parson Martext," said Tom King, "we can't afford to waste any more time. You must solemnize the marriage at once. Here, take this book; no expostulations, they will not avail you. Take this book, I say. It will answer your purposes just as well any other."

"Of course it will!" interrupted Claude, "and I will soon improve your recollection. Do you see this?"

As he spoke, he took out of his pocket a rather large-sized pocket-flask.

He held it up close to the parson's nose.

"Do you see this?" he repeated.

"Ye-es," stammered Mr. Martext.

"Do you know what it is?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you. It is a powder-flask and, if you don't like to believe me, look here."

Claude took an unloaded pistol from his pocket, and poured some of the powder the flask contained into the pan of it.

He pulled the trigger, and a bright flash succeeded.

"You see there is no deception about the matter, so just pay attention to what I am going to do."

The parson watched him with the utmost intentness.

Claude took the flask, and poured a small quantity of the powder it contained all round the cask.

"What's that for?" asked Mr. Martext, in the greatest trepidation.

"Hold, your tongue," said Claude; "you will see in a moment."

As he spoke, he continued to pour out the gunpowder; and, having surrounded the cask, he laid a train of it in a straight line, which he extended until his flask was emptied.

"Let me get down," roared Mr. Martext. "I don't like to stand here."

"If you move an inch," said Tom, "I will blow your brains out."

"Mercy—mercy!"

"Stand still, then."

"What does that powder mean?"

"It means just this," said Claude. "I am now about to summon the bride and bridegroom, and the moment they arrive you must begin and read the service without making any more fuss. If you don't, or if you hesitate about the words, or appear as though you were performing the ceremony against your will, I shall touch the end of this train of gunpowder with a match which I shall hold in my hand already lighted, so as to be in perfect readiness. The spark will fly along the train with the rapidity of lightning. It will reach the cask upon which you now stand. That cask is nearly full of gunpowder. It is in communication with that which I have sprinkled round the outside. The same moment, then, that I touch the end of the train with a lighted match, you will be blown up in the air, and, when you come down again, you will find yourself in a thousand pieces."

During the whole of this alarming speech, the countenance and gesticulations of the unfortunate parson were most amusing to witness.

His eyes rolled.

His teeth chattered.

His whole body trembled convulsively.

Indeed, his whole appearance was the embodiment of the most absolute fright.

No sooner, however, had the last words of Claude's speech been uttered, than he suddenly seemed to collapse.

All those muscles whose office it was to maintain his body in an upright position, seemed suddenly to lose their power.

He doubled up, as it seemed, into an inconceivably small compass, and rolled off the cask on to the green sward.

The highwaymen could not forbear laughing at this result of their threats.

However, as too much time had already been wasted, they determined to dally no longer.

Moreover, they feared Dick would lose all patience; and, not only that, they had a great deal of work to do before daybreak.

Tom King, therefore, went up to the spot where Parson Martext lay, a huddled-up mass.

He did not say a word, but clapped the muzzle of the pistol to his ear in the same manner as he had done before.

Horried as the prisoner was by the information which had just been imparted to him, and confused as his whole mental faculties were in consequence, he still retained sufficient sense to understand the fresh danger with which he was menaced.

He started up into an undignified sitting posture.

"Mercy—mercy!" he yelled.

"Silence," said Tom, "and listen to what I have to say."

"Ye—es, good sir; I am all attention."

"Very well, then. If you don't want me to blow your brains out this mement, you will mount up again on to that cask."

"No—no! Mercy!"

"I will show no mercy if you do not obey me."

"But the gunpowder?"

"You have nothing to apprehend from that. If you perform the service properly, you will be as safe standing on the top of that cask of gunpowder as you would be if you were standing upon an empty one."

"I can't do it."

"You have your choice between that and certain and immediate death. Which do you choose?"

"Oh! I am a dead man. Have mercy upon me, a miserable sinner!"

"Your alarm is quite groundless. I tell you, over again, you have nothing to fear if you will only comply with our demands. Rise, or sit still and have your brains blown out."

It would seem by his manner that the parson set a very high value upon this article, for any mention of it made an immediate effect upon him.

He rose tremblingly to his feet, and looked around him with a pitiful expression, which was, however, a comical one.

"Mount that cask," said Tom, pressing the muzzle of the pistol into his ear with still greater force. Reluctantly the parson obeyed.

He mounted the cask with the air of one who mounts the scaffold.

When upon it, his knees trembled so excessively as to make it problematical whether he would stand or fall.

"Keep still," cried Claude Duval, in a tremendous voice; "and now understand your position. Take this." He thrust the hymn-book into the parson's hands as he spoke.

It was taken submissively.

"Never mind about it's being a hymn-book," continued Claude. "I am quite certain you know the marriage ceremony by heart; so, when the bride and bridegroom kneel before you, you will repeat it as though the words were before you. If you do this, all will be well; no harm will come to you. To guard against all accidents, however, and to secure your compliance with what I have proposed, I shall stand at one end of the train with a lighted match in my hand, and if you fail in any way to perform your contract, I shall not scruple to blow you to atoms."

At this awful contingency, the parson seemed again in imminent danger of falling off the cask.

He recovered himself, however, when Tom presented his pistol.

Claude went on.

He judged he had already frightened and threatened the parson sufficiently, and so he thought he had better reassure him a little, for fear he should be too much overcome by his terrors to do what was required of him.

"On the other hand," he said, "if you perform the service to our satisfaction, and take the oath of secrecy which we shall propose, not only will you be perfectly free from all injury, but we will make you a present of a round sum of money, and take you in safety to your own house again. Now, silence. Those are our terms. You may accept them or not, just as you please. Prepare yourself. I am now going to summon the bridegroom."

As Claude spoke, he uttered the agreed-upon signal, and Dick immediately came forward in response to it.

He was at a loss to think what had been the cause of the delay, though he fancied it must proceed from some contumacy on the part of the parson.

Maud accompanied him.

She leaned heavily upon his arm.

Of the means taken to bring the parson to the chase she knew nothing.

She was, however, a consenting party to the solemnization of the ceremony.

Entirely led away by the romantic attachment which she experienced for Dick, she did not take into calculation all the results which must inevitably follow the step she was about to take.

If she is really in love, however, when does a woman pause or reflect upon future consequences?

At the last moment Maud felt some slight misgiving. But she shook it off, and would not allow her determination to be shaken by the strangeness of her position. She could not avoid feeling it acutely, in spite of her efforts not to do so.

Unresistingly, then, she allowed Dick to lead her up to the cask upon which Mr. Martext was standing.

She knelt down beside him, at his request.

Then Claude, who held a long piece of lighted touchwood in his hand, made an imperative signal to the parson to commence reading the service.

Fearful of the consequences of a refusal, he began.

But he was in such a state of agitation that he could not speak properly, and all that reached the ears of the bride and bridegroom was a confused, mumbling sound.

Whether it was right or not, they had no idea, but they took it for granted that it was.

As Claude had assumed, Mr. Martext knew the marriage service by heart perfectly well.

He faltered and hesitated once or twice, but, each time that he did so, Claude put the lighted match closer to the train of gunpowder.

This was sufficient.

The parson would recover himself, and proceed with renewed vigour.

He had a mortal fear of his life, and would rather do anything than sacrifice it.

As the reader may be sure, there was in reality no gunpowder in the cask.

That was a little fiction invented purposely to terrify Mr. Martext.

The cask was an empty one, which had been found among the miscellaneous odds and ends in the cavern, and had been used for a seat, for which purpose it answered very well indeed.

The powder which had been sprinkled about was genuine, but then scarcely any harm would have resulted to anyone if it had exploded, and Claude by no means intended that it should.

It shows how much the parson must have suffered his fears to get the better of him, or else he would have known that he was in no danger of an explosion, because the others would have been involved in the same destruction as himself.

That idea, however, never once occurred to him.

In a gabbling voice, he proceeded with the service until he had ended it.

He signified this by closing the hymn-book with a smart slap.

Then, completely overcome, he once more doubled up and rolled on to the ground.

The ceremony was over.

Dick Turpin and Maud were man and wife.

There was only one thing that was wanting to complete it, and that was a wedding-ring.

This deficiency, however, was not material, and could be supplied at the first convenient opportunity.

The union of the highwayman and a lady such as Maud was, was a strange conjunction of destinies, and we look forward with interest to trace its results.

Raising Maud to her feet, Dick at once led her away from the dell, leaving his comrades to square accounts with the parson.

This they at once set about doing, for time was fleeting fast; and ere long, they knew, the night, which had witnessed so many strange occurrences, would completely flit away.

They had a great deal to accomplish.

The diemay of the parson was to them a source of the greatest amusement.

Tom King had all along taken the initiative with respect to any proceedings connected with him, and he now continued to do so.

Knowing by previous experience the remarkable effect which the cold muzzle of the pistol had upon him, Tom once more pressed it into his ear.

The parson rose the moment he was commanded to do so.

He assumed a kneeling posture.

"Shake off your fears," said Tom. "You have done what we required of you, and you have now nothing whatever to dread from us in the shape of personal violence."

The repetition of this assurance seemed to have a revivifying effect upon him.

He struggled to his feet.

"We have promised to take you back to your house," continued Tom, "and you may rely upon our performing that part of the contract. Have you any idea where you are?"

The parson looked round him.

Observing he did not immediately reply, Tom repeated the question.

"I am in a wood," said Mr. Martext, at length.

"You needed no conjuror to tell you that; but what wood?"

"Ah! that I don't know."

"Then I should advise you not to attempt to find out. As we don't want you to know, you cannot be surprised if we take steps to make such a thing utterly impossible."

"You were good enough to promise me something for my trouble."

"Right," said Tom. "I am glad you reminded me; I always like to fulfil all my engagements."

Then, turning to Claude, he added—

"You carry the purse, so I leave that part of the business to you."

The parson turned round eagerly and avariciously towards Claude, who drew forth a large leather bag, and, plunging his hand into it, drew forth a number of guineas.

These he pressed into the parson's hands, who extended them impatiently.

The next moment they were conveyed, with a sigh of satisfaction, to his pocket.

Mr. Martext was poor, and the amount he now received was more than his annual stipend.

He by no means repented his night's work.

He considered himself amply paid for all the inconvenience, alarm, and terror he had suffered.

He professed his utmost willingness to take any oath of secrecy which they might think fit to propose.

Claude dictated one, which Mr. Martext readily repeated.

He seemed anxious to convince them of his good faith.

"We will now take you back to your residence, as we promised," said Tom King, "and you must not feel angry with us if we adopt such means as we think will prevent your discovering this retreat."

"Do anything but put me into that sack."

"If you have so great an objection to it, I daresay we can devise some other equally effective mode."

"Do so, then, I pray you, for the sack is excessively distasteful to me."

The highwaymen consulted together for a minute or two, upon this request.

It was at length agreed that Mr. Martext should merely be blindfolded, and placed upon a horse behind one of them.

To this the parson himself consented, and they at once proceeded to carry out the arrangement.

The long neckcloth which he wore was taken off, and bound over his eyes in such a manner as to make it an impossibility for him to see in the slightest degree.

Tom King then mounted his steed, and his two comrades lifted the parson on to the horse behind him.

"Clasp me round the waist," said Tom King, "and hold on for your life. If you don't, you will probably find yourself in the roadway."

Mr. Martext did not require twice telling to do this.

He clasped Tom convulsively.

There was no fear of his hold being shaken off.

Claude and Sixteen-String Jack now mounted their steeds, and accompanied Tom to the high road—it being their intention to take it in turns to relieve Tom of his burden.

They were careful, too, to take every precaution they could think of to baffle the parson, and confuse him as to the direction taken.

For this reason Tom would cause his horse to wheel round and round for several times in rapid succession, and then to set off in a straight line—but in what direction he judged it to be out of the parson's power to tell.

And in this he was quite correct; for though, when they set out, Mr. Martext had made up his mind to accurately observe the route taken, he soon became so completely bewildered that he gave up the attempt in despair.

CHAPTER CCLXXIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL HAS AN ADVENTURE ON THE HIGHWAY, AND MEETS WITH A SAD MISHAP.

HAVING succeeded in baffling the parson as to the route taken, the highwayman set forward, at the best speed of which their horses were capable, in the direction of his dwelling.

This they reached without the occurrence of any incident worthy of record; but, when just within sight of the church, the same manoeuvres were repeated.

Then, suddenly darting forward, Tom drew up with a jerk just opposite the gate leading into the churchyard.

Claude and Jack dismounted, and Mr. Martext, upon receiving the intimation that his home was reached, suffered them to lift him down.

When once they had got him in their grasp, they did not release him, but with great swiftness carried him to the palings, and, lifting him over, dropped him on to the soft soil in the graveyard.

The parson uttered a yell when he found himself falling, and, as soon as he reached the ground, he made a desperate effort to remove the bandage which covered his eyes; but, long ere he could succeed in doing so, he heard the trampling of horses' hoofs die away in the distance.

When, at length, he removed it and looked around, he found himself alone, sitting on a mound in the churchyard, and with no human being in sight.

Our friends considered that they had managed this business very cleverly, and congratulated themselves upon it.

The road before them was straight and level, so they put their horses to speed; for already upon the eastern horizon could be perceived some faint indications of the coming day, and they wished to gain the shelter of the chase before it got thoroughly light.

Gradually, however, a faint gray tinge overspread all objects, rendering them indistinctly visible.

As this pale, spectral sort of light increased in brightness, a curious kind of white mist became perceptible.

It seemed to rise from the ground and to increase in density as they proceeded, until, at length, they appeared to be enveloped in a cloud of white steam, making it impossible for them to see half-a-dozen yards beyond their horses' heads.

This was a phenomenon which all three of the highwaymen, when returning from their excursions on the road had frequently witnessed, and more than once they had owed their escape to it.

Never was the white mist more acceptable than on the present occasion, and they earnestly hoped that it would continue until they reached their destination.

It was of the utmost importance that they should not be seen to enter the chase by anyone, because the safety of their refuge there depended entirely upon their presence in it being unsuspected.

Despite the manifest danger, then, of so doing, they pushed on at full speed through the mist, trusting more to the sagacity of their horses than their own to keep them clear of any obstacles.

Soon, however, it became evident that the mist was local, or else that it was passing away; for, as they continued on their way, its density rapidly diminished.

Suddenly as they looked in advance, the three highwaymen saw simultaneously some huge, black, shadowy object. It was approaching them rapidly.

Under the impulse of the moment they pulled up, and drew their horses close to the side of the road.

No sooner had the clattering of the hoofs of their own steeds ceased, than another sound reached their ears.

They recognised it in a moment.

It was that peculiar grating, crushing noise which is produced by a vehicle passing rapidly over a gravelled road.

Before they had time to more than notice this, the huge shadowy object which they had first perceived swept by them at full speed.

They then saw that it was a large travelling carriage, which appeared larger to their eyes than it really was, in consequence of seeing it through the mist, which, though thin, magnified and distorted all objects in a remarkable manner.

There was a sudden rush, and then the vehicle became lost to sight, though the grinding of the wheels could still be heard.

"It was a fortunate thing," said Tom King, "that we perceived that carriage when we did and drew aside. If we had not, we must inevitably have come into collision with it, and we, beyond all doubt, should have been the greatest sufferers."

"There can be no question about that," coincided Jack; "for they never reduced their speed in the least. I wonder who they can be, travelling at such a tremendous rate, and at this unusual hour, too?"

"I have a great mind to find out," said Claude Duval; "for, I can assure you, what I gave the parson has reduced the amount of our wealth very materially."

"No—no, Claude."

"But I say it has."

"I don't mean that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Why, don't think of stopping that carriage."

"Why not?"

"Because, as sure as you do, we shall not reach the chase until long after daylight; and I should not like the secret of our place of refuge to be discovered just yet."

"Nor need it be. This is a thinly-populated piece of country, and we need not feel so afraid of being seen."

"Well, do not let us run the risk on this occasion."

"Why not? I cannot allow a good booty, such as that probably is, to pass me without making an attempt to obtain possession of it."

"But it will be unwise to do so in this instance."

"Not a bit."

"Besides, while we have been talking the carriage has got quite out of hearing."

"Never mind that—I can easily overtake it."

"What! going at such a speed as it was?"

"Yes."

"But think how late it will be when we return."

"Not at all. The business will be over in ten minutes; and it is so long since I had an adventure on the road, that I feel it to be a matter of impossibility for me to let this one pass by."

So saying, Claude struck his spurs sharply into his horse's flanks, and, before his comrades could say another word, or make the least attempt to stay him, he darted off at full gallop in the direction the carriage had taken, and which was, of course, away from Eufield Chase.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack could not help feeling annoyed to find their comrade act in so headstrong a manner, and they feared the worst results would ensue.

However, the mischief was now done, and the only thing they could do was to make the best of it.

Accordingly, then, they turned their horses' heads in the direction Claude had taken, and followed him, determined to share whatever danger he might incur, and also to be at hand in case their presence should be needful.

But such was the impetuosity with which Claude had set forward, that he was already out of sight and hearing. They, however, spurred their horses and endeavoured to come up with him.

The reader will doubtless recollect that, several times lately, Claude expressed his dissatisfaction at the dull, inactive life they were leading.

He longed for the excitement of an adventure on the road; and on the present occasion, as we have seen, this feeling got the better of his prudence.

He knew the danger and risk that he would run, but the knowledge did not deter him; and he galloped off alone in the manner we have related, calculating that his companions would follow him, and caring very little whether they did or not.

He soon found, however, that the carriage had got much further in advance than he could have believed possible; and, although his own speed was so terrific, it was some time before he came in sight of it.

When he did so, day had fairly dawned, and the faint light in the east was rapidly extending itself over the whole of the heavens.

In spite of this circumstance—and he could not fail to notice it—Claude kept on.

He was certainly gaining; on the carriage, and he pressed his steed to make a still greater effort, and overtake it as speedily as possible.

The clattering of hoofs was terrific, and sparks flew from the flinty stones upon the road at every bound he took.

It seemed as though the sounds of his approach reached the ears of those of whom he was in such hot pursuit.

At any rate he fancied their speed was much increased. Still he gained on them rapidly.

Claude looked back once or twice, but he could see nothing of them.

A few more minutes elapsed, and then he approached within a yard or two of the carriage.

He held a loaded pistol in both hands, having taken the reins between his teeth.

Judging himself to be near enough to effect his purpose, he fired one of the pistols in the air, and, the moment he had done so, dropped the now useless weapon into the road.

His left hand was now free, and he seized the reins with it.

Then, when the report of the pistol had died away, he cried, at the top of his voice.

"Halt! coachman. Pull up your horses, or you are a dead man!"

The first pistol Claude had fired in the air, but the explosion terrified the coachman, and he was by no means sure whether he was not dead already.

However, he still retained his senses sufficiently to comprehend Claude's command, which fell upon his ear with painful distinctness.

Mechanically he tightened his hold upon the reins, and the four horses by which the carriage was drawn came to a standstill.

The vehicle itself swayed about a great deal on its springs in consequence of having been stopped so quickly, but before the oscillation ceased the window was let down with a tremendous clatter, and a man's head was projected through it.

"Drive on, coachman!" he cried, in tones of startling energy. "Drive on, I say! How dare you take orders from anyone but myself?"

Implicit obedience was the coachman's duty, and now he did not scruple to give the horses a sharp slash with the whip, in spite of Claude's threat.

The high-mettled steeds plunged and reared for a moment before they started off.

During that moment Claude reached the side of the coach.

"Halt!" he cried again. "Halt, I say, or it will be the worse for you!"

With great suddenness the man who had put his head out of the carriage window turned round, and, before Claude had the least idea of what was about to happen, he levelled a pistol at him with great rapidity, and fired.

It was evident that he was a proficient in the use of the weapon, or he could not have taken aim so hastily as he did.

"Take that!" he cried, as he pulled the trigger.

At the same instant the carriage was set in motion.

Claude's finger was on the trigger of his pistol, and he fired.

But the shot was an aimless one, and the trigger was drawn only by a convulsive contraction of the muscles.

He reeled in his saddle.

A gasping sob came from his lips.

The discharged pistol and the reins dropped from his strengthless grasp.

A film gathered before his eyes.

Still he made a desperate effort to retain his seat in the saddle.

It was in vain.

Another gasping sob, which sounded almost like a groan, came from his lips.

He swayed twice from side to side in the saddle.

Then dropped like a log to wood into the road.

CHAPTER CCCLXXV.

DICK TURPIN AND MAUD GOULDMAN HAVE A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE WITH A SNAKE IN THE OLD CAVERN.

As we have already related, Dick Turpin, as soon as the marriage ceremony was concluded, led his newly-made bride from the spot at once, leaving his friends to square accounts with the parson, of which scene he by no means desired that she should be a spectator.

He was married to her under the name of John Palmer, for it would not have done to trust the parson with the secret of who he really was.

He thought, if his comrades properly carried out the



[TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK DISCOVER THE LIFELESS BODY OF CLAUDE DUVAL.]

instructions he had given them, that no more would be heard about the matter.

Whether he was right or not in this conjecture, we must leave for time to determine.

As might be expected, Mand expressed her surprise at the extraordinary behaviour of the parson, and questioned Dick closely as to the cause of it.

But he returned only evasive answers to her interrogations, and endavoured to change the subject of the conversation.

This he had out little difficulty in doing.

A keen wind swept through the forest-glades, and Mand shivered more than once.

"Come," he said, "the night air is cold; let us seek the warmth and shelter of the cavern."

"And Claude and his two comrades, where are they?"

"Fear nothing on their account. They are about to set out upon an expedition, from which they will not return for some hours. Most probably it will be at day-

break, and that is now far distant. Come, then, to the cavern, where we can depend upon not being interrupted."

Mand assented, and permitted Dick to lead her in the direction of the entrance.

She was now a highwayman's bride, and, though she repeated the words over and over again in her mind, still she could not realize fully her position.

However, she said nothing, although she could not banish a slight feeling of depression.

But, when she looked up into Dick's countenance, and saw it beaming with love, and the deepest possible respect, she felt cheered and reassured.

At length the cavern was gained.

A wood fire was smouldering on the stone which was set in the floor.

It was dim, and seemed on the point of expiring; but close at hand was a heap of brushwood, placed ready to replenish it, and this Dick cast on pretty freely.

The wood was dry and the twigs small, so the fire quickly burned up, and diffused, not only a comfortable warmth, but a cheerful light over the cavern.

Dick drew one of the seats they had found close up to the fire, and, seating his companion upon it, placed himself by her side.

For some moments both were silent.

Dick's thoughts were busy, and so were Maud's.

The former was reflecting upon the change which had taken place in his position, and the effect it was likely to produce upon his future prospects. The latter was considering by what means she could win him from his present mode of life.

As the interval of silence increased in length, it became more painful, and Dick resolved to make a bold effort and break it.

He placed his arm round Maud's waist, and gently drew her towards him until her head reclined upon his shoulder.

Then, in as cheerful a tone as he could command, he reverted to the occurrences of the past, and the extraordinary concatenation of events by which they had become acquainted with each other.

He alluded to all the manifold incidents which had since occurred, and all of which must be familiar to the reader, so that it will be unnecessary for us to repeat their conversation.

As he proceeded, however, Maud became insensibly interested, and joined in his remarks.

Most particularly did they dwell upon Blanche's unhappy lot, and Maud found it out of her power to restrain her tears.

She told Dick how much the poor girl had suffered, not merely from her father's death, and all the terrible circumstances connected with it, but from the fact that she had fallen deeply and violently in love with the son of her uncle, Adrian Winberry, but who in no way resembled his bad parent.

Still, whatever his good qualities might have been, she found it would be impossible for her to unite herself to the son of her father's murderer.

From such a union no good could possibly result.

And so she pined and grieved in the hopelessness of her affliction.

In this way the time passed rapidly and pleasantly.

Suddenly, however, Maud raised her head.

As she did so her countenance became convulsed with sudden terror.

Her lips parted, as though she was about to utter a shriek, but no sound issued from them.

Her eyes were fixed upon some object which rendered her speechless with horror.

She had encountered it the moment she raised her head, and found it impossible to remove her gaze.

It was fascinated.

But Dick saw nothing.

Maud knew it, and strove with all her might to speak, and warn him of the frightful danger with which he was menaced.

But in vain.

The faculty of speech was utterly denied her.

Still, she clung with convulsive energy to her companion, and her grasp tightened rapidly.

Surprised, Dick looked down to ascertain the cause of it, and was astonished to find her countenance distorted with horror.

He saw her eyes were intently fixed upon some object, and in a moment he turned his face in the direction in which she looked.

As he did so, a shout of surprise, but hardly of fear, burst from his lips, and he sprang suddenly to his feet.

A sickening, hissing sound, which chilled the life-blood in their veins, followed the movement.

Dick staggered back a step, and, in doing so, overturned the seat upon which they had been sitting.

Brave and bold-hearted as we know him to be, Dick Turpin may well be excused for the emotion he exhibited.

The object upon which his eyes had fallen was enough to dismay the stoutest heart.

On the side of the fire opposite to that upon which he sat was a huge serpent. In some strange way it raised its long, shiny body upwards, and moved its head about with a restless, uneasy motion.

The height at which it held its head from the floor, was at least four feet.

Its body was of immense thickness, and covered with scales, which glittered with a hideous brightness in the firelight.

At every movement they sparkled vividly, and assumed a thousand different hues and tints—from the brightest yellow to the deepest black.

Well calculated to inspire fear and disgust as such an animal could not fail to be, its most terrible features have yet to be described.

Its head was large and broad, and furnished with two comparatively small eyes, but of the most intense brilliancy that can possibly be imagined.

No words could possibly describe their peculiar character. They possessed a strange power of fascination.

When Maud first saw the serpent, her gaze was immediately riveted upon its eyes, and she found it impossible to look in any other direction.

As we have seen, it deprived her of every faculty.

She was like one spell-bound.

Every muscle was rigid, and insensible to her will.

She was rooted to the spot.

Precisely the same effect was produced upon Dick, but not in the same degree.

When he looked in the direction to which Maud's terror-stricken countenance was turned, he saw the hideous creature, and, under the first shock of surprise, had uttered a shout and started to his feet.

His eyes had been riveted upon those of the serpent, and he felt it beyond his power to remove them.

He made several efforts.

They were all vain ones.

The serpent's mouth was stretched open to its fullest extent.

Its horrible, forked, fang-like tongue played in and out with a ceaseless motion.

A sickening hiss issued from its throat, which seemed to increase in loudness and malignancy every moment.

It appeared preparing for a spring.

Dick was appalled.

His breath came from his lungs in short and unequal gasps.

Suddenly the serpent moved, as though about to glide round the fire and attack them.

For a moment, then, Dick's eyes were freed from their horrible fascination.

He took advantage of that moment.

He grasped the hilt of his sword, and drew it from its scabbard.

The polished blade gleamed brightly in the firelight. With his other hand he still supported Maud.

On came the snake.

This time, however, Dick took care not to encounter the glittering, reptile-like eyes.

He stood prepared to destroy the snake, which, from its general appearance, he felt convinced was of a venomous character.

One touch of those long poisonous fangs would be sufficient to cause death either in himself or his companion.

Dick was ignorant, too, of the full powers of mischief which such a creature possessed.

Steadily it came towards them, with a hideous, undulating motion.

Dick fancied it had the power to spring upon them from a distance.

He held his sword in an attitude of defence, determined to use it upon him should an opportunity present itself.

Maud was motionless. She was once more under the influence of the serpent's fascination.

Dick tried to release himself from her hold, and spring forward and attack it.

But he could not shake her off.

Gradually and stealthily the snake came nearer, until Dick fancied he could reach it.

He raised his sword and brought it down with the full force of his arm.

It hissed through the air.

But he missed his aim.

The serpent saw the sword descending, and drew back its head just in time to avoid the blow which was levelled at it.

Infuriated at his failure, Dick started forward a few paces, despite the danger of so doing, and struck another blow.

He did not wait to see the result of the blow, but drew back precipitately.

It was well he did so.

He inflicted a slight wound upon his adversary, but that was all.

Enraged by the pain the wound doubtless occasioned, the vibrations of the snake became more rapid.

It was about to dart upon them and enfold them in its embrace, when Dick, instigated by the courage of desperation, again sprang forward, although Maud tried her best to hold him back.

Again he struck at the snake, aiming as well as he could at the creature's head, which, he believed, was the only mortal part about it.

The sword descended with terrific swiftness, but the snake swerved aside, and the keen blade inflicted only a slight wound near its neck.

Terrified by his failures to produce an effect upon the creature, Dick darted aside with all the rapidity he was master of, dragging Maud with him.

It was well he did so.

Maddened by these repeated attacks, the serpent darted forward, and would have inevitably struck them, had they continued to stand upon the same spot.

As it was, they escaped.

But Dick was now growing alarmed that, ere he could destroy this noxious reptile, one or both of them would be afflicted with its venom.

The snake, baffled in its first attempt, turned round with surprising rapidity.

Dick retreated.

The snake followed with a rapid motion, leaving a streak of blood behind it on the floor of the cavern to mark its progress.

CHAPTER CCCLXXVI.

THE NON-ARRIVAL OF TOM KING, CLAUDE DUVAL, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AT THE CHASE AT THE APPOINTED HOUR, FILLS DICK TURPIN WITH UNEASINESS AND ALARM.

THE danger with which Dick Turpin and Maud were assailed was of no ordinary description.

The present adventure was one totally dissimilar to any he had ever had before, and therefore, it is not to be wondered at if he failed to act with his usual coolness and daring.

As the serpent approached, therefore, he retreated, endeavouring to keep the fire continually between himself and it.

The behaviour of the serpent now indicated the utmost anger and ferocity.

It darted its forked tongue in and out of its mouth, with inconceivable rapidity, and hissed incessantly.

Still Dick managed to keep out of its reach.

This, however, was a state of things that could not last, as all hopes of tiring the animal would be futile.

He would have sheathed his sword and drawn a pistol, and endeavoured by means of that weapon to defeat his adversary, but he feared that, during the time it would necessarily take to do this, the serpent would make an attack upon him.

As for his companion, she was too much overcome with fright to be of the least assistance to him—in fact, she was an incumbrance rather than otherwise, for, without her, Dick doubted not that he should be able to vanquish the reptile.

As it was, she impeded the freedom of his movements.

At length Dick paused.

He felt that he could not continue thus retreating round the fire, for it required increasing vigilance.

Moreover, to add to the perplexity and horror of his situation, the fire showed evident symptoms of expiring.

The light it now gave was dim and perplexing, and the flames were fast subsiding into a dull red glow.

A vigorous stir would have altered this, and caused the fire to burn up brightly; but, placed as Dick was, it was out of his power to do even this simple act.

Confusing shadows were cast around, but still Dick's

keen eye caught sight of the snake stealthily approach-

ing. Slowing it came, with its body flat upon the ground, and its treacherous-looking head raised only a few inches from it.

By a rapid motion, Dick changed his position somewhat.

He now stood with Maud more behind him than he had done hitherto.

His intention was to shield her from harm as much as possible.

Then, holding his sword in an attitude to strike, he awaited the approach of his enemy.

Either unconscious, or unheeded, of the uplifted sword, the snake continued to advance.

Dick knew the danger of allowing it to come too near to him, and, watching his opportunity, he darted forward with great suddenness.

Just at that moment, the snake made a spring.

But Dick observed the oscillation of his body, and was prepared.

Down came his sword, but again the rapid movement of the creature rendered his aim untrue, and instead of the sword striking him full upon the head, as he fully intended it should, it fell upon the fleshy part of the snake's body, about two feet from the head.

But such was the force and precision of the blow, that the body was completely severed.

Dick now considered the victory was gained, but he soon found that the battle had yet to be won.

Both portions of the snake now writhed themselves into strange contortions, and he quickly perceived that the vital principle, which is so strongly implanted in this class of reptiles, was far from being extinct.

The fangs were still charged with poison, and he had a narrow escape of coming into contact with them.

Provisionally, however, he escaped.

Blood flowed in prodigious quantities from the severed body of the snake, and literally dyed the floor of the cavern.

One more blow would, however, be requisite to dispatch the creature, but how to deliver it he knew not.

Maud elung to him with frantic violence.

Her fear was fast becoming more demonstrative.

She was deaf to all Dick's entreaties and commands to release him, and allow him to slay the monster.

He had no resource but to drag her with him, and this he found was no easy task, for she was no longer passive in his hands, as she had been.

In some unaccountable manner the severed serpent still continued to writhe itself toward Dick, still animated by the idea of doing him an injury if possible.

At length it came near enough.

For the last time our hero raised his sword.

This time his aim was not destroyed.

The sharp blade descended full on the middle of the serpent's head.

There was a horrible, sickening crash, and then the awful creature ceased to exist.

By this one blow Dick had divided its head between its eyes.

It was dead.

He gave a sigh of relief, and, flinging down his sword, he caught Maud in his arms.

For a moment he dreaded she would swoon, but she recovered herself.

It was the dread that Dick had been hurt by the fangs of the serpent that enabled her to do so.

She was terribly frightened and agitated, and our hero had much ado to calm her.

At length he did so, and, upon learning that he was wholly uninjured she burst into a flood of tears.

They soon relieved her heart, and she was able not long after to look up into Dick's countenance with a smile.

That smile he would have given empires to purchase.

Looking up, he saw, near the roof of the cavern, a dim, hazy light, which showed him that dawn was at hand.

For the present the cavern could not be otherwise than disagreeable to Maud, and she required but little persuasion to be induced to leave it.

"I expected my three comrades back again ere this," said Dick, as they emerged from the passage into the open air; "but they have not returned, and I cannot imagine what has occurred to delay them."

"Let us walk towards the borders of the chase," said Maud.

"I was just about to propose that we should do so. It may be that we shall meet them on our way."

"Was the expedition upon which you told me they had gone a dangerous one?"

"By no means. But you tremble. Are you cold?"

"No, no; but I cannot divert my thoughts from the terrible conflict you had in the cavern with the snake."

"You think too much about it. Try to banish it from your mind."

"I fear that will be impossible, for, to the longest day of my existence, I fancy that awful spectacle will be before my eyes."

"It was an awful spectacle," said Dick, "and we ought to feel thankful we have escaped so well as we have."

"I think I shall never be able to venture into that cavern again."

"Nay, nay; I think that fear a groundless one."

"But we may be attacked again."

"Such a thing is possible."

"Then, who could run such a danger a second time; or, if anyone was found willing to do so, how could he hope a second time to be the best off in the encounter?"

"That is very just; but serpents are by no means common in England, and, in all probability, this is the only one for miles round. I now remember having heard that these strange creatures have a strange affection for fire, and have been known to travel many miles in search of one."

"That, then, may have been the occasion of our visitation."

"In all probability it was so. Do you not recollect that, when we first perceived it, it was close by the fire?"

"It was—it was; and it may be that, if we had not molested it, it would never have hurt us."

"That, too, is possible, but I should not have liked to have trusted to it. However, when Claude, and Jack, and Tom return, I shall relate the whole affair to them, and then, with their aid, make a thorough exploration of all the hidden intricacies of the cavern. Our safety demands that we should not delay doing this."

"But the danger?"

"It will be less than remaining in ignorance of the place, and, besides, we shall all the time keep carefully on guard. It is a disagreeable event and I am much annoyed that it has happened."

"Hark! Dick, what is that?"

Both listened.

"I hear nothing," said Dick at length.

"Nor I now."

"What kind of sound was it that attracted your attention?"

"It sounded as though someone was creeping through hedges, and trying how silently it could be done."

"But I heard nothing."

"The noise was very slight."

"And now all is still."

Both listened again, but no sounds reached their ears except those peculiar to the forest.

It was a few moments after this that both reached the borders of the chase.

Not only had day fairly dawned, but the sun had already attained a considerable altitude above the horizon.

There was an anxious expression upon Dick's countenance as, having noticed this, he looked around and saw no signs which indicated the approach of his companions.

He was entirely at a loss to account for their being so much longer than he had anticipated; and, as the time continued to slip by without bringing him any indications of their coming, he began to grow much alarmed.

This uneasiness did not escape Maud, and she questioned him as to the cause of it, for she now began to think that the expedition upon which they had gone was of by far more dangerous a character than Dick had led her to believe.

He, however, assured her to the contrary.

"What can have delayed them," he said, "I am quite at a loss to think. I fear they have fallen into some unexpected danger."

"We can but wait with patience," said Maud, "and hope for their return. They may arrive almost immediately."

"I fear not."

"Upon what grounds?"

"I do not think they would venture to return to the chase while it is light; but, then, where can they be?"

Dick was much perplexed, and very uneasy.

He paced up and down with hasty strides, striving to calm the commotion of his mind.

Fain would he have leaped upon the back of his gallant mare Black Bess, and sallied forth to ascertain the fate of his companions, but the impossibility of leaving Maud behind him, and the manifest danger he must be the means of bringing down upon them all by thus exposing himself, put such a thing entirely out of the question.

As the day wore away without bringing any tidings of his absent comrades, his uneasiness increased, until at length he made up his mind that the worst had happened.

Never had a day appeared so long; but at length it passed away, and night came on.

Right grateful did Dick feel when he saw the lengthening shadows which the trees cast upon the greensward.

As the sun sank behind the horizon, a chill wind swept over the face of nature; but, heedless and insensible of it, he stood near the borders of the chase, listening for the faintest sound.

The twilight, which endured a short time after sunset, deepened into night.

But his comrades came not.

All things became involved in the general gloom.

Still Turpin waited at his post in vain.

The silence remained unbroken.

CHAPTER CCCLXXV.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK SET OUT IN SEARCH OF CLAUDE DUVAL.

FROM what has already been related, we doubt not the reader will be able to understand why it was that Dick Turpin and Maud waited vainly at the appointed spot for the return of the three highwaymen.

We will return to them, and relate what further happened on that eventful morning.

When Claude had ridden up to the travelling carriage and stopped it, he little dreamt of the fate he was bringing upon himself.

The particulars of this adventure will be fresh in the mind of the reader.

He had fired a pistol in the air, and then, as soon as the noise of the explosion had ceased, commanded the coachman to stop.

His order was obeyed, for the report of the pistol still rung in his ears, and the coachman was not quite certain whether he was shot or not.

No sooner, however, had the vehicle been brought to a standstill, than the occupant of the carriage let down the window, with a terrible clatter, and, in a voice of extreme irascibility, inquired how he (the coachman) dared take orders from anyone but himself.

He concluded by ordering him to drive on.

The coachman obeyed.

He smacked his whip, and the high-spirited horses, giving one plunge, set the vehicle in rapid motion.

At this moment, the occupant of the coach, turning his head round, saw Claude Duval.

He then, without waiting another second, fired a pistol at him.

Claude was quite unprepared for this sudden attack. The aim was a true one, and the person who fired was evidently an adept in the use of the pistol.

The bullet struck his friend full in the breast.

His finger was already on the trigger of his pistol, in readiness to fire, and the sudden spasm which shot through his form caused a contraction of the muscles in his fingers, and the weapon exploded.

The shot, however, was perfectly aimless.

Claude was conscious that he was wounded, and strove to retain his seat in the saddle.

The effort, however, proved an abortive one.

The hand of death seemed to grasp him tightly.

He swayed backwards and forwards twice or thrice as he endeavoured to retain an erect position in the saddle. Each time, however, he grew more incapable; until at length he uttered a strange, gasping sob, and fell into the

roadway like a mass of inanimate matter, and not like a human being.

As he fell, the pistol he held in his hand slipped from his grasp on to the road, while his left foot in some way got entangled in the stirrup.

When he fell he was utterly unconscious.

Fortunately for him, his horse, though terrified to a degree, did not move from the spot, but stood exactly in the same position, trembling in every limb.

Had the horse started forward at a gallop—and such a thing was far from improbable—the consequences would have been terrible in the extreme.

Unable to make the slightest movement, and deprived of all power to extricate his foot from the stirrup, he would have been dragged, a bruised and mangled mass, at the heels of his steed, until death should have released him from his sufferings.

Claude Duval, however, was not destined for such an awful fate.

As we have stated, when he fell from the saddle to the ground, the horse, although suffering an agony of fright, stood profoundly still.

But of this Claude was ignorant.

The film that had come over his eyes appeared to him to be that of dissolution, and after that moment he remembered nothing.

It may, perhaps, be thought that he fully deserved the consequences of his own rashness and refusal to listen to the remonstrances of his comrades.

The danger of the enterprise upon which he had announced his intention of setting out, had been pointed out to him. But he heeded not what they said.

Intent only upon an adventure, which would vary the monotony of the life he had recently led, he cut short the brief dispute which had taken place between them on the subject by clapping spurs to his horse's sides, and darting off in pursuit of the carriage, which, owing to the swiftness with which it rolled over the ground, was no longer audible or visible.

For a moment or two after his abrupt departure, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack sat in silence on their steeds.

The former was the first to break the silence.

"How foolish it is of Claude," he said, "to act in this manner. It seems as though he was quite indifferent whether or not our hiding-place is discovered."

"It is either that," replied Sixteen-String Jack, "or else the devil has got possession of him."

"You may depend it is the former," said Tom; "for latterly he has done nothing but grumble about the inactive life which we have been leading."

"So he has; and you think he has made up his mind to put an end to it?"

"I do."

"Well, I must say, he has gone the right way to work; for look, it grows lighter and lighter every moment, and we are a long way from Enfield Chase."

"It is very annoying, in every way you look at it. Not only will Dick be angry at such mad-headed conduct, but, doubtless, he is at this very moment standing at the appointed spot waiting for us."

"We shall not be there by daybreak, that is certain."

"No, for it is daybreak already, and Dick will be fancying all manner of evil has befallen us."

"But what are we to do? We must not stay here talking like this."

"I can hear nothing of Claude."

"Nor I. There's no knowing how far he may continue his mad gallop after that carriage."

"He will follow it until he overtakes it, you may depend."

"I suppose he will."

"That is just his character. For my own part, now that day has fairly dawned, I think the further we get away from Enfield Chase the better."

"Exactly, for if we are seen, as we are almost sure to be, and are at a good distance from it, the chase will not be suspected as our place of refuge."

"Precisely so. Then I propose that, instead of waiting here like this, we set off in pursuit of Claude."

"Agreed, my friend."

The two highwaymen, being both of the same opinion upon this point, struck their spurs into their somewhat jaded animals, and, at a steady gallop,

took their way in the direction Claude Duval had gone.

It was fortunate for him that his comrades came to this decision.

The white mist, which we have mentioned, still hung in places on different parts of the road.

It seemed to have rolled itself up into dense masses, and then waited for a puff of wind to carry it away.

It thus happened that our two friends were unable to see very far in advance, for if they were not actually enveloped in one of these fleecy masses of mist there would be one on the road before them, through which they could not see.

Besides this, the morning light was faint in the extreme, and a considerable time would elapse ere the sun rose.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack were well pleased to find that all along the road they did not meet with a single human being; but this is scarcely to be wondered at, for the hour was one at which few people would be abroad even in populous places.

Our friends pursued this road, for a long while, without meeting with anything that indicated the presence of their absent companion.

At length, however, they entered one of those masses of mist of which we have made mention.

The road sank down into a kind of hollow, and the mist appeared to fill it completely.

It extended, too, for a great distance over the meadows on either side.

They quickly discovered, after going a few yards, that the mist was much denser here than they had hitherto found it.

This was in consequence, not only of the road being so much lower in this part than any other, but because of the immense tracts of swampy, marshy land in the vicinity.

In a short time, so dense did the mist become, that our friends could scarcely see beyond their horses' heads; and, as they were quite ignorant of the character of the road before them, except that they found it descended rapidly, they judged it prudent to reduce their pace to a walk.

The further they proceeded the denser did the mist become, until they were unable even to see their own horses' heads.

Consequently, they were invisible to each other.

They spoke continually, in order to be sure that they were not far apart; and it was only by this means that they were able to keep together.

To attempt to guide their horses was quite impossible, so they let their reins fall upon the animals' necks, and placed themselves entirely under their guidance, relying more upon the finer senses of their steeds than their own.

In this they acted wisely.

The horses went very slowly but surely, and they kept the middle of the road.

The silence that prevailed was something remarkable. Indeed, it had a painful effect upon our friends.

It was not as though all was still, but as though the mist enfolded all things in its embrace, and deadened all sound.

Even the trampling of their own horses' hoofs only reached their ears in a muffled manner, the effect being almost the same as if they had trodden upon snow.

This was a natural phenomenon which neither of the highwaymen had ever before witnessed, and they longed to find the road rise, for, while it descended as it did, there was no hope of it getting thinner.

In this expectation they were disappointed.

The ground continued to have a downward tendency, though they fancied the descent was not so steep as it had been.

What was on either side of them they could form no idea, and their eyes ached with the efforts they made to pierce the uniform-coloured mass before and around them.

It was during this strange, hushed silence—if we may so speak—it was while the sounds of their own horses' hoofs reached their ears but indistinctly, it was during a pause in the conversation which the two highwaymen kept up with each other, that their ears were assailed with a sound so dreadful, so horrible, so utterly unlike

anything which they had previously heard, that the first shock of surprise caused them to fairly reel in their saddles before they could recover themselves.

A strange chill struck to the heart of Sixteen-String Jack as he heard this terrible and unearthly sound, and, in a voice of extreme agitation, he cried to his companion—

"What is that? Tom, Tom, what is that?"

CHAPTER CCCLXXVIII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A MYSTERIOUS ADVENTURE WHILE SEARCHING FOR THEIR MISSING COMRADE.

TOM KING did not reply.

He could tell by the tone of voice in which his companion asked this question how greatly he was agitated, and he could not conceal from himself the fact that, if he spoke, it would be in the same anxious, hesitating manner as Sixteen-String Jack.

Therefore he was silent.

But, had he been able to command his voice, he would not have been in a position to return a satisfactory answer to his question.

The sound he had heard was so totally unlike any other that had struck upon his ear; and he was quite at a loss to think from whence it could have proceeded.

It was, too, quite indescribable; and, though its echoes still vibrated in the air, they would have been unable to convey to a third person any idea of what it was like.

Tom reined in his steed.

At the same moment, by making a great effort, he was able to call out to his comrade to halt.

Sixteen-String Jack was only too glad to obey him.

Guided by the sound of his voice, he made his way close to his companion's side.

He extended his hand and touched him.

Tom King uttered a shout.

This circumstance will serve to show how much he was quivered by the sound he had heard.

Sixteen-String Jack was perfectly invisible, and the shout he uttered was one of alarm upon feeling himself touched, without being able to see by whom.

Jack's voice, however, reassured him, and, holding out his own hand, he grasped that of his staunch comrade.

Here they remained, quite motionless and speechless.

They were listening for and longing to hear a repetition of the sound which had struck so much dismay to their hearts.

Whether the horses were alarmed by the sound, or whether the infection of the fear which their riders exhibited communicated itself to them, would be hard to say; certain, however, is it, that they manifested extreme terror.

They trembled in every limb, and their ears were projected forward as though they, too, were listening for the awful sound to come again.

The highwaymen were not kept long in suspense.

The sound came again.

But this time, it was louder and more horrible than before.

It was, too, more prolonged.

It died away in a kind of sighing moan.

What could be the meaning of such a sound?

It was certainly not human.

Tom and Jack were not more sure of their existence than they were of this.

What, then, did it portend?

They shuddered as they simultaneously asked themselves this question.

All men are superstitious.

This may sound a bold assertion, but it is a true one.

It seems to be a feeling, an impulse, implanted in every mind.

As a matter of course, it varies with different persons, both in intensity and degree.

There may be some philosophic minds who would avow that they were free from all taint of it.

Doubtless, under most circumstances, they would be so.

But, surround them with something awe-inspiring—something which they cannot comprehend—something altogether out of the pale of their experience—and then observe the effect.

In spite of their philosophy, in spite of the scepticism which they will endeavour to call in to their aid, they will feel their soul shrink within itself, and their mind become a prey to superstitious influences.

So it was with our two friends.

Their daring and bravery have, on many occasions, been exhibited, and the reader will not require to be told that they possessed those qualities in an eminent degree.

Now they were surrounded with strange circums-

stances.

They were in a portion of the country wholly unknown to them.

They were surrounded by a mist possessing qualities different to anything they had previously known.

They were unable to see where they were, or form any conception of the peril with which they might be environed.

It was under such circumstances as these that they heard the terrible and heart-dismaying sound, and it was in consequence of this that it produced the effect it did upon them.

Had they heard it in the bright sunshine, or in some place with which they were familiar, the effect would have been different.

Boldly enough they would have proceeded to ascertain from whence it came.

But now they remained quite still.

Had this terrible sound some connexion with their missing comrade?

This was a question that would intrude itself upon their minds.

They could not divest themselves of the idea that it was in some way connected with him.

Was it the foretoken of his death?

Unable to move to ascertain this, they remained with their hands clasped.

At length, however, ashamed of this fear, which, though natural, they persuaded themselves was totally unworthy of them, they determined to push on cautiously for a few yards at least.

Accidentally, they patted their steeds upon the necks, so as to reassure them as much as possible, and strove to urge them forward.

In vain; they planted their forefeet firmly upon the ground, and, drawing their bodies back, refused to stir an inch.

An application of the spur produced no better results.

In fact, it served to confirm them in their obstinacy.

It was while thus engaged that our two friends again heard the terrible sound, and they now noticed something in connection with it which had previously escaped their observation.

This was that the sound appeared to proceed from somewhere very close at hand.

But whether it came from the right or the left, from above or below, they could not tell.

It seemed to fill all the dense white mist with which they were surrounded, and to reach their ears on all sides.

Rendered desperate by again hearing the sound, and furious that their horses should have disobeyed them, they renewed their efforts to urge them forward.

The horses, maddened with the sharp application of whip and spur, reared violently and swerved, but they did not advance.

If anything, their motion seemed to retrograde.

Suddenly the highwaymen ceased their fruitless efforts.

They had made an important discovery.

The mist was growing thinner and more transparent, and, probably, ere long would completely disappear.

They soothed their horses, and induced them to remain still.

Further and further they were able to see around them, as the mist slowly but imperceptibly dispersed.

At first they were able to distinguish the horses upon which they sat.

Then the two friends could dimly see the outlines of their own forms.

But every moment they increased in distinctness.

Then the tall hedgerows which fringed both sides of the road came into view.

But the attention of both highwaymen became wholly absorbed in a contemplation of their steeds.

They stood with manes erect, and necks outstretched.

Their nostrils were expanded, and their ears directed forward.

They shook with terror.

It seemed as though they could see something before them which excited their fears.

Perhaps, however, it was only the effects of their former fright.

Vainly did both Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack strain their eyes and try to ascertain whether anything was on the road before them.

As yet the mist was too opaque for their vision to pierce it for any distance.

Again they tried to urge their horses onwards, for the mist was now fast losing the density which had previously characterized it.

It was to no purpose.

Their eyes were still fixed upon something.

Again came the awful sound, and when they heard it the horses started and shook, and gave utterance to a strange cry, which was doubtless expressive of fear.

Again the highwaymen bent forward in the saddle, and tried to learn what was on the road before them.

A black, dusky, shadowy-looking object at length met their straining sight.

They closed their eyes a moment, fancying themselves deceived.

Quickly, however, they opened them again.

Something like a huge and shapeless black cloud was evidently before them.

Its size was gigantic, and its outlines so faint as to be indistinguishable from the mist into which they merged.

What could it be?

They knew not, but they could not help feeling convinced that, let the shadowy object be what it might, it was from it that the horrible sounds proceeded.

Clearer and clearer grew the mist.

Gradually it faded away.

Its colour changed in some mysterious way, and this was another occurrence for which our two friends could not account.

The explanation of it, however, was simple.

The sun had risen, and it was his early rays irradiating the mist which caused the change of colour so inexplicable to the highwaymen.

In consequence of it the white mist assumed a golden, yellow tint.

As they gazed upon the black object, its indistinctness seemed to increase, and its size also.

What it was, however, they were still unable to form any idea.

At last its outlines became better defined.

Slowly they traced them, and likened them to various objects which, as they proceeded, they found to be erroneous.

At length Tom King spoke.

"Look, Jack," he said. "Look at it now. What is it like?"

"I cannot tell."

"Now, now," continued Tom, "it resembles a horse; but whoever saw a horse of such dimensions? It is larger than an elephant!"

"It does resemble a horse," said Sixteen-String Jack, after looking attentively for a few moments. "But that it should be a horse is quite impossible, for who ever saw a horse such a size as that?"

"There it is, my friend. That is what puzzles me; and yet I can liken it to nothing else. Its resemblance to a horse becomes every moment more striking. I am bewildered."

"So am I; but we cannot do better than remain where we are. The mist is rapidly fading away, and when it completely disappears, which it shortly must do, we shall then be able to come to a correct conclusion with respect to this extraordinary affair."

"You are right, my friend; we will remain still, and watch attentively."

Both the highwaymen now relapsed into silence.

They concentrated all their attention upon the mysterious object before them, which had caused them so much alarm and speculative conjecture.

So absorbed were they that, for the time being, their absent comrade was forgotten.

If they had been two statues they could not have remained more immovable than they did.

Suddenly, however, the mist disappeared, as if by magic.

The means, however, was simple enough.

A stiff breeze had sprung up, and the mist scattered before the first puff of it.

Away it rolled, it rolled in fleecy masses, over the meadows, leaving the roadway almost clear, and fully revealing the mystery which had so perplexed Tom and Jack.

CHAPTER CCCLXXIX.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S CONDITION IS FOUND TO BE VERY DESPERATE INDEED.

STANDING in the centre of the roadway was a horse.

There was no mistake now about the matter.

But the horse was shorn of its tremendous stature, and now presented itself of the ordinary size.

A moment's thought enabled our friends to come to a correct conclusion upon this point.

The apparently gigantic size of the animal had been caused in consequence of their viewing it through the dense medium of the mist, to which the sun's rays communicated extraordinary refractive power, causing all objects seen through it to appear magnified in a surprising degree.

If Tom and Jack had looked at each other, they would have perceived the same thing had taken place with respect to themselves, though not to so great an extent, in consequence of their proximity.

These reflections, however, did not occur to Tom King and Jack at the moment, though we have thought fit, for the satisfaction of the reader, to set them down here.

What they saw farther occupied all their thoughts and attention.

The horse, whose size had appeared so gigantic, was standing in an attitude of the utmost terror.

His mane was bristling, and his eyes, which were turned upon our friends, were almost starting from their sockets.

In a word, the whole appearance of the creature was indicative of the utmost extremity of terror.

In the surprise caused by the sudden discovery they had made, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack had uttered a loud shout.

It was one of anguished horror.

It was not, however, the horse only which caused this. Lying on the ground in a pool of blood, which had flowed from a wound in his breast, his arms outstretched upon the damp earth—with a pistol almost within reach of his hand—his left foot entangled in the stirrup, was Claude Duval.

Such, as the reader will remember, was the position in which we last described him, and such was the position in which he was discovered by his comrades.

This was indeed a dismal spectacle to meet their eyes, and one which they were far, very far from expecting.

It had never for a moment crossed their minds that they should find Claude in this unfortunate condition; and so great was their surprise that, for some moments, they remained without attempting to move.

No longer were they at a loss to understand why their horses had refused to advance.

The antipathy of such creatures to human blood is surprising.

They will scent it from afar off, and refuse to pass it. Here the crimson fluid lay upon the road in large quantities.

Not only was Claude literally surrounded with it, but there was a long streak of it extending for some distance, showing that the horse had not all the time remained motionless as they found it, but had dragged the body of their companion along the road.

That, under such circumstances, he could continue to live, seemed quite out of the question—or, if he was alive, they felt convinced that life was held by the frailest and most uncertain tenure.

This was a point, however, which they would have to ascertain, and, in doing it, a considerable difficulty presented itself.

If they alighted from their steeds, they feared the horse, alarmed at the movement, would set off at headlong speed—dragging Claude, a bruised and mangled mass, after it.

This was so extremely likely, that the two highway-men, with a terrible feeling of sickness at their hearts, remained still in their saddles.

The attitude of the horse, though expressive of so much fright, was one also that indicated his inclination to set off at a gallop upon receiving the slightest provocation to do so.

In such a state of excitement, the least thing would startle it, and our friends, necessarily, felt full of dread.

It seemed as though the least attempt to approach the animal would be sufficient to cause the death of their friend, if he was not dead already.

On the other hand, to permit him to remain in his present position was not less dangerous.

It was evident, then, that the horse would have to be approached and seized.

Now, when in their calmest and most quiet moods, our friends were well aware this was a by no means easy task.

For more frolic they would gambol away from the hand outstretched to catch them.

Their hearts sank as they saw all the difficulties with which they had to contend.

Besides, while they were in this state of indecision, some other persons might arrive upon the scene, or something might occur to startle the horse.

The effort must be made.

At length, Sixteen-String Jack resolved to make the desperate attempt.

He spoke to Tom King, announcing his intention, and directing him to remain perfectly still while he alighted.

Tom consented, for of the two he had much rather his friend endeavoured to perform the unpleasant task than himself.

Gently Sixteen-String Jack slipped off his steed.

Claude's horse, attracted by the movement, gazed at him frightfully.

For some moments Jack did not attempt to move.

Slowly, however, he held out his hand in an encouraging manner.

The horse seemed to look at it wistfully and suspiciously.

Then Sixteen-String Jack spoke to it and in such a manner as he judged would be best calculated to soothe his apprehension.

The horse looked at him for a moment or two, and then stretched out its neck.

Encouraged by this, Jack ventured to advance a step, taking care to keep his hand still extended, and continuing to address it.

The horse took a step towards him irresolutely.

Jack advanced until he was almost near enough to touch it, and then he paused.

If he was too precipitate he would ruin all.

He had met with more success than he had dared to hope for, but still he did not allow it to bind his caution.

Circumspection was more than ever necessary.

Once more he advanced.

But this time the horse showed an inclination to start away.

Jack did not trust him further.

At the last moment he might deceive him and start off.

Measuring his distance, therefore, with all the accuracy of which he was capable, Jack sprang forward with great swiftness.

His aim was a correct one.

The horse started and plunged, but not until Jack had firm hold of him by the bridle.

He patted him with the other hand.

As soon as he saw that his comrade had secured the horse, and that there was no danger of his starting away, Tom King hastily dismounted and came to his assistance.

Leaving Jack to control the horse, Tom made his way to the prostrate form of Claude Duval, and set about releasing his foot from the stirrup.

He saw, at a glance, that, in consequence of the position of the foot, the easiest and quickest way of disengaging it would be by unbuckling the stirrup-leather.

This he hastened to do.

He had no difficulty whatever in the matter, for Sixteen-String Jack had quite succeeded in quieting the horse.

When the latter saw Claude's foot freed from the stirrup, he led the creature away and tethered it to the bough of a tree, which grew near the side of the road.

Then, with a heart full of anxiety, he ran back to ascertain whether Claude was dead or alive.

He was by the side of Tom King in a moment.

The first glance was anything but assuring.

His face was colourless and corpse-like, and his body rigid.

His eyes were staring wide open and covered with a kind of glassy film, which they always present in death.

Both shuddered.

Kneeling down, however, Sixteen-String Jack tore open his clothes in order to ascertain the character of the wound he had received.

A glance told him that it was caused by a pistol bullet, which had struck him in the chest.

From this the blood had ceased to flow, in consequence of the serum having coagulated over it.

His body was icy cold.

With a choking sensation at his throat, Sixteen-String Jack placed his hand upon his old comrade's heart.

He could feel no pulsation.

The action of that mysterious organ was stilled.

A deep groan came from Jack's lips, and tears started from his eyes.

Tom King was scarcely less affected, for his acquaintance with Claude was not a thing of yesterday.

"Alas," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, in a voice of anguish, "my first forebodings are realized; he is quite dead. Little did I think, when he rode away from us so suddenly, that that was the last I should see of him in this life. He is dead, and the truest, best, and bravest heart has ceased to beat!"

Jack ceased.

His emotions overpowered him.

He could speak no longer.

His friendship and companionship with Claude Duval had been of such long standing that he never thought that it could come to a termination.

Now, however, the end was reached.

So great was his grief, that he was oblivious of all things else, and it was some time even before Tom King became alive to the extent of their danger.

It was, however, imminent.

They were upon the broad high road, and day was rapidly advancing.

Discovery seemed certain; and it was clear they could not hope to remain much longer in their present exposed situation without being seen by someone.

Gradually Tom King made Sixteen-String Jack sensible of this, but for a long time he refused to take into consideration the danger in which he might individually be placed.

At length, however, Tom King succeeded in persuading him to stifle his grief for a short time, while they removed the body of Claude Duval to some more retired place.

The argument which had most weight with him—and, indeed, which induced him—was this.

Tom King hinted the possibility of the dead body of his much-loved comrade falling into the hands of the officers of police.

He at once consented to its immediate removal.

With a heavy and almost bursting heart, he assisted Tom King to raise the body.

Then the question arose, to what place should they take it.

Looking around them, they perceived at no great distance a clump of trees, which formed either a plantation or coppice, and to this they resolved to direct their steps.

It was too far off, however, for them to carry their comrade's body, so, at the suggestion of Tom King, it was placed across the back of his steed, which they would be able to lead in the required direction.

CHAPTER CCCLXXX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE HORRIBLE SOUND IS UNRAVELLED, AND TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK CARRY CLAUDE DUVAL'S BODY TO THE WOOD.

DURING the whole of these proceedings, Claude Duval exhibited no signs of life, but presented every appearance of a corpse.

There was not the slightest symptom to raise the hope that he was yet alive, though holding possession of existence by a frail and uncertain tenure only.



[DICK TURPIN COMMANDS THE EXECUTION OF THE SPT.]

Like a sack of grain he was lifted by his two sorrowful comrades, who, having carried him some distance, placed him on the back of his own horse.

The creature trembled and shook.

His eyes glared; and once again the two highwaymen heard the frightful and unearthly sound which had so much alarmed them.

Even now they started, and, in their surprise, almost let fall the body of their comrade.

The mystery was now explained.

The sound came from the horse!

Yes; strange as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless true.

But it was such a cry as neither of our friends had ever heard a horse give utterance to; and, but for the evidence now before them, they would never have believed it.

The sound was one expressive of the utmost terror, and is never uttered by a horse except when severely hurt, or extremely frightened.

Its character was most unearthly, and could be likened to nothing else but what it was.

Claude's horse, with that sagacity which is so frequently exhibited in such creatures, seemed to comprehend what had befallen his master.

The cry might have been wrung from him through terror, or—who knows?—it may have been uttered for the purpose of bringing assistance.

Many and many a time during that night had he startled all those around with the horrible groaning, groaning sound.

That the creature was terrified to a degree, was quite certain.

Its glaring eyes, erected mane, and trembling form, all bore indisputable proof of the fact.

It was, too, bathed in perspiration, which nothing but fright could have produced.

Tom King and his comrade could not but feel gratified at this satisfactory solution of what seemed to be an insupportable mystery.

The condition of Claude Duval, however, too much occupied their thoughts for them to exchange any remarks with each other respecting it, though, doubtless, at a future and fitting opportunity, they would have some conversation on the subject.

By this time day had fairly begun, and they were full of apprehension lest they should be discovered before they could reach the distant shelter.

Sixteen-String Jack took upon himself the mournful duty of holding Claude on the horse, so that the motion should not cause him to fall off.

The two other horses were close at hand, and these Tom King held by the bridle with his right hand.

With his left he grasped the rein of the frightened animal, which seemed possessed of fresh fear at its lifeless burden.

Tom, however, had little or no difficulty in leading it away along with the others.

Ere he started, he looked eagerly up and down the road, in order to ascertain whether they were observed. All, however, remained silent.

There seemed to be no people at all upon the road, which he could not help thinking was an extraordinary circumstance, though a very favourable one to him just then.

Suddenly, however, his keen eye detected in the distance a small cloud of dust.

"Look, Jack!" he cried. "Look behind you! Someone is on the road. I fear now we shall be prevented from reaching the shelter of yonder trees unperceived."

Jack's eyes were dim with tears, which he found impossible to repress, and he had to draw his hand across his face before he could see what his companion pointed out.

When he saw the cloud of dust, upon which the sun shone with great power, causing it to be distinctly visible at a great distance, he said—

"Yes, Tom, horsemen are on the road, but they are a long way off. If we are speedy in our movements, we may get under shelter before they can perceive us."

"Come on, then, my friend."

"Lead the way; I will take care of poor Claude's body. Alas! I never thought that he would die such a death as this. Lead the way, Tom, and don't go too fast or you will shake him off."

Tom King looked up and down in search of some opening in the hedge through which they might make their way, but nothing of the kind presented itself.

As far as he could see, the hedgerow presented a uniform and unbroken line.

It was necessary that they should cross the hedge in some way or other, because the little clump of trees they wished to reach was on the other side of it.

This was exceedingly awkward at a moment when time was of so much importance to them.

The horsemen, whose approach the cloud of dust indicated, were rapidly drawing nearer, and every moment diminished the chance of being unseen by them.

If, as they more than suspected, these should be officers of police, their situation would be embarrassing in the extreme.

Hampered as they were with the body of their late comrade, they would be unable either to fly with sufficient rapidity to distance their pursuers, or successfully contend with them if it should come to an encounter.

No amount of danger, however great, would, we are persuaded, have had the effect of causing them to abandon the dead body of their comrade to their foes; no, not even if they were certain of securing their own positive safety by doing so.

Under these circumstances, then, and with all these thoughts fully before his mind, it is not to be wondered at that Tom King should experience a great degree of anxiety, and look eagerly up and down.

To remain where they were, however, would do no good, and to go towards the approaching horsemen would be little short of madness.

So, adopting the only course of action open to him, he led the way along the road in the opposite direction, hoping soon to see either a gate leading to the meadows, or else a gap in the hedge through which they could force their way.

Sixteen-String Jack found his task of holding his comrade's body on the horse by no means an easy one, and he also became conscious that they were leaving a

track behind them which could be followed with the greatest ease.

From various parts of Claude's body, and also from his apparel, blood trickled slowly, and fell drop by drop upon the road.

This must be altered, or discovery would be inevitable.

He spoke to Tom King upon the subject, and for a moment they were puzzled what to do.

At length Sixteen-String Jack hit upon an expedient of which Tom signified his approval.

Both the highwaymen stripped off their coats, and wrapped their deceased comrade in them.

This was found to answer their purpose admirably.

The blood no longer trickled down upon the roadway; and, probably, the coats would prevent it doing so for some time.

This occupied them several moments, and, when they again started, they perceived that in the interim the horsemen had rapidly gained upon them.

Still, however, they found they were too far off for them to speak with any degree of precision as to their character.

Evidently they were in great numbers.

The size of the cloud of dust which they raised in their progress was ample evidence of this.

That they were either police-officers or soldiers, in search of the highwaymen, seemed beyond all doubt.

As rapidly as possible Tom pushed on.

Still he was vexed not to be able to see a gate.

They were now in almost the lowest part of the hollow into which the road sunk.

Both before and behind was a long, steep hill.

Down one the horsemen were coming, and up the other it seemed that Tom King and Jack would have to take their way.

There was a bend in the road not many yards before them, and, as soon as they passed round this, they hoped to be lucky enough to find a gate.

Even if they did not, they would be out of sight of those in the rear, for some minutes at least.

Presently the bend was reached.

Passing round it, almost the first thing that attracted Tom's attention was a gate, which was swinging open in the road in a somewhat dangerous manner.

This caused him to increase his speed.

As the gate was not very far off, it was soon gained.

As soon as they passed through it, they endeavoured to close it after them.

This, however, they were unable to do, for the fastenings were broken.

There was a large stone lying near, and this Tom King placed against the bottom bar of the gate in such a manner as to prevent it swinging open again.

They now found themselves in a ploughed field of vast extent.

At right angles to the gate, however, and the road they had lately been pursuing, was a tall, quickset hedge running in the direction of the clump of trees whose shelter they were so anxious to gain.

This hedge divided the ploughed field in which they stood from a meadow; and, as its direction was at right angles to the road their pursuers were coming, they were in hopes, by keeping close underneath it, of eluding their observation altogether.

Animated by this hope, they pushed on at even greater speed.

Just under the hedge was a narrow, beaten path, upon which they could walk without difficulty.

The ground rose rapidly beneath their feet, and they hoped to be able to pass the brow of it before the horsemen reached the pool of blood in the lane.

This, they calculated, would delay them a few moments at least.

If those who approached were officers, then a close search would be certain to take place.

If, on the other hand, they were merely civilians who were approaching, their first impulse would be to spread an immediate alarm, and look for the body.

Now, if Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack were not recognized in their character of highwaymen, the circumstance of their being in possession of the dead body would be sufficiently suspicious to warrant their being detained and taken into custody.

The reader will, therefore, comprehend how manifold and cogent were the reasons which induced the highwaymen to shun observation as much as possible.

At length the crest of the hill was reached.

Below them were several fields, and beyond these the clump of trees which had first attracted their attention when in a higher part of the road.

To this they still resolved to direct their steps, for they could perceive no other place which offered them the promise of a shelter.

They commenced their descent.

Scarcely had they done so, however, than a loud cry, which seemed to issue from many a lusty throat, struck upon their ears.

They knew the meaning of it in a moment.

The pool of blood had been discovered, and the fact that they had no time to lose was pressed more urgently upon them.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXI.

A TROOP OF LIGHT DRAGOONS FOLLOWS HARD UPON THE TRACK OF THE HIGHWAYMEN.

ACCORDINGLY, their pace was accelerated as much as possible; but they were not able to go very fast, from the fear they had that Claude would be shaken off.

By this time, however, Sixteen-String Jack had succeeded in getting the body of his friend tolerably well balanced, so that he had not so much difficulty in holding him on.

At present, however, they were sure they were out of the sight of their enemies, and they hoped to be lucky enough to continue so until the wood was gained.

It was now not far off, and every moment seemed to materially increase the distance.

No more sounds reached them, except the one wild shout of astonished discovery; but whether this was because they were too far off to hear what happened further, or whether it was because no other cry was uttered, they knew not.

The horsemen, whose approach they had perceived, were part of a troop of light dragoons, who, in common with a great many more of the home troops, had been sent out on the (to them) unwelcome expedition of searching for the four highwaymen, whose late daring and desperate deeds had made the whole country ring.

The authorities had at last taken the matter vigorously in hand.

The length of time which had already elapsed since the daring outrage at Newgate, without the perpetrators of it having been brought to justice, caused a general outcry against the insufficiency of their means in dealing with such desperate characters.

For their own honour's sake, then, the authorities had taken the matter in hand, and they felt that their own reputation was at stake.

The large rewards they had offered for the capture of the offenders had proved quite useless.

If the police could not, under such a stimulus as this, accomplish the task set them, they were certainly quite incapable of doing it at all.

Having come to this conclusion, the police were set aside, and they resolved to try what could be done by military aid.

Orders were given in the proper quarter that so many troops should be singled out for the service, and this was accordingly done.

In a very military manner the soldiers, under the command of their officers, were made to patrol the roads within twelve miles round London.

They were divided into small detachments, each one of which had a particular piece of ground to go over.

Their instructions were commensurate with the exigency of the occasion.

Should they encounter any of the highwaymen, they were to pursue them with all possible speed and energy.

If they found it impossible to overtake them or to make them prisoners, they were to be shot down without mercy; as captured they were to be, one way or the other.

These orders sound somewhat sanguinary, and unlike those issued by the authorities in such matters generally; but the reader must bear in mind the peculiar posture of affairs.

The public prints of the period were loud in finding fault with the insufficiency of the means of dealing, with these desperate law-breakers, and this caused the adoption of more stringent measures than, perhaps, would otherwise have been thought of.

Such, however, were the instructions given to the soldiers.

The highwaymen were to be captured, either dead or alive, and it did not seem to matter much which.

As for the military themselves, small mercy could be expected from them.

There was not a man among them who was not disgusted and angry with the extra and unsoldier-like duty they had to perform; and they made up their minds, as they were obliged to submit to their orders, to put an end to the affair as quickly as they could.

In quite an angry and revengeful spirit, then, from which our friends had everything to dread, the soldiers set about their new duty.

Up to the present moment, as we are aware, they had met with no success whatever.

Owing to the highwaymen having kept so close within the shelter of Enfield Chase, all their patrolling had been without result; and they had the additional aggravation of knowing that they had taken all this trouble for nothing.

It was by no means a treat to be obliged to leave the barracks and pace up and down a piece of road way night after night—especially when the season was so far advanced as it was.

There was a sharp frost every night, and they felt the effects of it severely.

Still they met with nothing to reward them for their trouble.

The roads remained perfectly quiet; people made their journeys to and from the metropolis in safety, and nowhere was there any rumours of alarm.

From this it became clear to them that those of whom they were in search were hiding somewhere.

If so, they had only to wait patiently for them to make their appearance.

This was what they were least capable of doing; but the authorities were inflexible, and they had to continue their disagreeable duty.

The reader will easily understand how fraught with danger to the four highwaymen, in whose fortunes it is presumed they feel an interest, such a state of things as this must be.

But what was worst of all was that they were ignorant of the additional danger with which they were menaced.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, as they made their way towards the plantation, thought that at most they were officers who were so close upon their track, and the idea of their being soldiers never once glanced across their minds.

Upon reaching the bottom of the hill which they had been descending for some time, and upon reaching the lowest part of the hollow into which the road fell, the horse upon which the foremost of the dragoons rode suddenly swerved; and, had he not been an accomplished and practised horseman, would certainly have unsaddled him.

As it was, he only preserved his balance with difficulty.

Looking down upon the ground to see what it was that had caused the animal's alarm, he perceived an immense pool of blood.

Under the impulse of the moment he gave utterance to a loud shout of surprise, which was echoed by several of his companions.

It was this cry which had reached the ears of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack as they bore the body of Claude Duval over the fields.

Upon making this discovery, several of the dragoons, by the command of their officer, alighted, and made a closer examination of the pool of blood, and the ground in the neighbourhood of it.

From the appearance of the former they were quite of opinion that it had not lain there very long.

The discovery of the streak of blood which our friends had noticed followed as a matter of course.

This, the reader will remember, had been caused by the horse dragging the body of its rider after it.

Following this streak of blood, which they had no diffi-

culty whatever in doing, the dragoons found it extended only a short distance, and terminated in another pool of blood, the dimensions of which were almost equal to the one they had found.

Here, then, was ample enough evidence that a tragedy of some kind or other had been perpetrated, and they doubted not that, if they only took the trouble to look around them, they would quickly discover still further traces of it.

With this impression they examined the ground all round, but this afforded them very little information.

The ground was dry and dusty, and blurred all round with footmarks, produced both by horse and man.

Not a few were produced by themselves, and they found themselves puzzled to say which.

The discovery of the spots of blood which had flowed from the wounds of Claude Duval when he had been placed upon his horse by his two companions, was next made, but these ceased after they had followed them for a few yards.

They were unanimously of opinion that a struggle had taken place, though what evidence there was of it we know not.

Still, that was their impression.

They were of opinion, too, and in this they were indisputably correct, that the struggle had only taken place a short time before—an hour they thought at most.

To men who had been ordered out upon what they had been led to believe was dangerous service, but who hitherto had met with nothing to vary the dull monotony of patrolling up and down a lonely country road, this discovery which they had just made was quite an interesting one, and, for the mere desire of having something to do, and something to occupy their thoughts with, they set about making a vigorous search all around.

They had already consumed sufficient time in their explorations, and Tom and Jack made the best use of it they could.

Leaving the soldiers to prosecute their search along the road for something which should elucidate the mystery of the pools of blood, we will return to the proceedings of the two highwaymen.

When they heard the shout, they made sure that, in another moment, their foes would be upon them; and, stimulated by this impression, they made still greater speed.

They were well aware of the importance of their gaining the shelter of the trees unseen.

If they did so, they had a secure hiding-place; if not, they would only have the meagre benefit which the cover would afford them in an encounter.

Owing to the position of the hedgerows, which happened to run most conveniently for them, they were able to keep on their course without being exposed to the view of any persons who might be in the road they had so lately left.

This was very fortunate for them.

Had they been compelled to cross the open meadows to reach their destination, instead of being able to creep along under the hedges as they did, they would inevitably have been seen by the dragoons, many of whom stood up in the stirrups, and took as long a look round the country as they from their elevated position could.

For the reason just given, however, they failed to see our friends, who were effectually screened from all such observation.

With all steadiness and speed the two highwaymen continued their melancholy journey towards the little wood, which seemed to mock all the attempts they made to approach it, and to recede as they advanced.

This, however, was the effect of their own anxious minds.

Gradually they were nearing their much-wished-for destination.

All sounds from the rear had ceased, and they began to indulge themselves in the hope that they should be able to get off undiscovered.

It was a very narrow escape, for, had the mist continued much longer than it had, or had they any longer delayed the removal of the body, the dragoons would have been upon them before they could have got out of sight.

At length our friends reached a spot where there were no longer any hedgerows to cover the route they took.

They had reached a large piece of barren, uncultivated

ground, with which the little wood appeared to be surrounded.

This they would have to cross.

The distance was not great, but all the way there was not so much as a shrub to shield them from observation.

Perceiving this, Tom King, who led the way, very prudently came to a halt, and resolved to reconnoitre before he went any further.

With this intention, he pulled aside some of the twigs in the hedge, and, peering through, endeavoured to ascertain whether anyone was in sight.

But, though he looked closely and carefully in every direction, he was not able to see anyone.

Fancying that it was now safe for them to cross this open space, Tom King once more took hold of the horses by their bridles, and the little procession once more started on its way.

Three minutes, or even less, sufficed to enable them to cross this piece of waste land, which apparently encircled the wood like a belt.

Quite a gush of joy came over their hearts when they found themselves fairly under the friendly shadow of the trees; but, before they pushed on into the interior, Tom King again paused, and, having taken up a requisite position, looked long and keenly in the direction they had come.

With his eye he was easily able to follow the route which they had so lately travelled, even to the gate through which they had passed on quitting the high road; for the little wood was situated upon an eminence commanding an extensive prospect, and which caused it to be a conspicuous object for many miles round.

Although his scrutiny was so close and searching, Tom King was unable to see anything that was at all calculated to raise any feeling of alarm; and, with his heart relieved on this score at least, he struck at random into the wood, being intent only upon reaching some place of concealment.

CHAPTER CCLXXXII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK ARE INTERRUPTED IN THEIR MELANCHOLY TASK OF DIGGING A GRAVE FOR CLAUDE DUVAL.

He was fully impressed with the importance of doing this with as little loss of time as possible, not only on account of his pursuers, if such they were, but upon the account of Claude Duval.

He was anxious to satisfy himself that he was really dead, for he did not feel disposed to take that unpleasant fact for granted.

In fact, he would much rather remain sceptical upon the point until furnished with some more positive proof than he had at present.

There was, however, very little in the appearance of his comrade to inspire hope, for he had not, up to the present moment, shown the least signs of vitality.

Wrapped up in the coats which his two companions had so hastily placed round him, he looked a strange object, and no mass of inert matter could have laid across the saddle more helplessly than he did.

The trees in this little wood did not grow very closely together, and they met with little or no difficulty in leading the horses onward.

The ground rose rapidly beneath their feet, which was the chief thing they had to contend against.

The wood was, in fact, nothing more than a conical-shaped hill, overgrown with trees; so that, no matter at what part it was entered, the ground had a rapid upward tendency.

In spite of this, Tom King went on.

He was anxious to get as far away from the outskirts as he could, which would lessen the danger of discovery; he was in hopes, too, of shortly finding that the trees would stand more closely together, and afford a better chance for concealment.

In this, however, he was disappointed.

There was little or no undergrowth, such as is generally found in a wood; for the most part, short, sweet herbage took its place, and the trunks of the trees were, upon an average, two yards apart.

Notwithstanding this, the hill, when seen from a distance, seemed clothed with verdure from the base to the summit.

This was because the trees were evergreens, and with large leafy branches.

Up this steep ascent, then, our friends toiled—Tom King with the bridles of the horses in his hands, and leading the way, Sixteen-String Jack holding the body of Claude Duval upon the horse, and so overcome with grief as to be only partially conscious of whither he was being led.

Claude had been his intimate associate for so long a period that no one losing their nearest and dearest relative on earth would have felt the parting more keenly than he did.

From the rear no sounds of an alarming character reached their ears, and Tom King began to congratulate himself upon the circumstance of having entirely eluded the observation of those who were so close behind him on the road.

Suddenly a faint ejaculation of surprise came from Tom's lips, and, startled by the sound, Sixteen-String Jack looked up.

He, too, was astonished at the strange view before him. The summit of the conical hill was reached.

A circular piece of ground, about twenty feet in diameter, upon which no trees grew, appeared.

It was covered with grass, and here and there were a few small, stunted shrubs.

It took but another moment for the little party to reach this level place.

They advanced to the centre of it, and then, pausing, looked about them.

Tom King then found his previous ideas fully verified.

Round them, in an irregular circle, grew a tall belt of trees, and the place upon which they stood was not only the summit of the hill, but the centre of the wood.

From the belt of trees by which they were environed the ground gradually sloped down to the level country.

It was a singular piece of natural scenery, and, being so, we have taken the trouble to particularly describe it.

Satisfied by the hasty glance they cast around them, Tom and Jack now turned all their attention to their comrade.

With great care he was lifted off the horse, and laid at full length upon the soft turf.

This done, Tom King took the three horses, and, leading them to a distance, tethered them to a tree in such a manner that they were able to crop the soft, sweet herbage.

He then returned to Sixteen-String Jack.

Claude Duval had been laid upon the ground with his face upturned to the sky.

Sixteen-String Jack was kneeling down beside him, and looking with a pained expression into his countenance.

This was as white and inanimate in its appearance as a marble statue.

The eyes were still blindly staring open, and covered with a glassy film; the teeth were still tightly clenched together.

The whole of his body was quite cold and rigid.

That he was quite dead there could be very little doubt, and yet both his comrades were loath in the extreme to admit it.

They would not, could not, believe in the possibility of such a thing.

Tom King observed the anguish of Sixteen-String Jack, and said not a word; but, going to the other side of the prostrate form, he knelt down and took hold of one of Claude's hands.

It was quite cold.

He placed his fingers on his wrist, but was unable to detect the least fluttering of pulse.

He let go the hand with a deep sigh.

It fell like a stone upon the ground, assuming precisely the same position.

In a voice, broken by emotion, Tom said—

"Jack, my friend, what is to be done? Alas, I fear that all is over, and that our gallant comrade is no more."

Sixteen-String Jack made no reply, but, burying his face in his hands, uttered a deep groan.

Tom leaned forward, and tearing open Claude's apparel, placed his hand upon his breast, immediately above the region of the heart.

Here he fancied he could detect some little warmth; but in this circumstance there was little hope, for, as he well

knew, the heart and the parts surrounding it did not grow entirely cold until some hours after the spirit had fled.

He was anxious to know whether any beating could be distinguished.

But all was still, and he was at length forced to the conclusion that his heart had ceased to beat.

All, then, was over.

He withdrew his hand.

Jack still kept his face covered.

Tom addressed him,

"Cheer up, my friend; such grief as you exhibit, though a worthy tribute to your respect for your old comrade, is quite unavailing. It becomes our duty now to look to ourselves. We can do nothing for Claude, poor fellow; he is far beyond the reach of our aid. But we are surrounded with danger, and it is a duty we owe ourselves to look to our own safety and preservation. Cheer up, then, my friend, and let us do the best we can."

Sixteen-String Jack, thus addressed, removed his hands and looked Tom King full in the face, who was pained to a degree to witness the grief-stricken appearance which it exhibited.

"Tom," said Sixteen-String Jack, holding out his hand as he spoke, "let us part. As you justly say, you have your own safety to look to; as for me, my place is here, by the side of my old comrade and friend, and here I will remain, in spite of every obstacle."

Tom King looked at him with mingled grief and surprise.

"Jack," he said, "this is madness! But I can excuse you, for I know the causes which have produced it. It is not solely my own safety which I wish to seek, but yours as well, my friend. Can you forget the troop of horsemen who were so close behind us on the road? They may have got upon our track, and if so, they will be shortly here. Then what is to be done? Because your old comrade is dead, would you be content to resign yourself and his body into the hands of our enemies? Never! We must defend ourselves. I can pardon you for allowing your grief to obtain a brief mastery over your faculties, but now you must rouse yourself, and do that which is best."

Tom paused, expecting Jack to make some reply.

But he continued silent.

Undaunted, however, Tom King renewed his solicitations.

"We can do nothing for Claude now," he continued. "It lies in the power of no man to recall the dead to life. We have only one sad, mournful duty to perform. You comprehend it. It is to consign his body to the earth, and thus prevent the authorities from wreaking any indignity upon his lifeless remains. Surely, you would make an effort to prevent such an occurrence as that. Rouse yourself, then, and assist me to dig his grave! Alas! it grieves me quite as much as it does you to think that is the best service we can render him."

While Tom spoke thus energetically his companion became more himself.

Totteringly he rose to his feet.

In a broken voice, he said—

"You are right, you are right. It was weak and foolish of me, but—"

He ceased abruptly.

His sobs prevented further speech.

Impatiently he dashed his hand across his eyes, and endeavoured to repress his rising emotion.

"Come," he said, "I will help you. Claude now is no longer able to defend himself, and it is our duty, as you say, to prevent any indignity being wreaked upon his remains. We must not allow him to fall into the hands of his enemies. I am ready to assist you."

Tom was pleased to find that he had so far succeeded in rousing his companion.

He looked about him for a spot which would answer his purpose.

Then, crossing the little circular space, he halted beneath the wide-spreading branches of one of the largest of the trees that fringed the enclosure.

Jack understood him, and, after casting one glance upon Claude's lifeless form, followed him.

Not another word was said.

They had no better tools for digging a grave than the swords they wore by their sides, but it was by no means the first time they had turned them to such a use.

Tom King now traced the outline of the grave with the point of his sword, and began removing the turf in such a manner as to enable him to replace it as it had been found, and so as not to excite any suspicion that the ground had been disturbed.

This was a work of time, but at length the task was completed.

It was now high time, Tom thought, to reconnoitre.

Accordingly, he threw down his sword, and, leaving his companion to commence the excavation of the grave, he prepared to climb the tree beneath whose shade he had been at work.

It was of considerable altitude, and, from its position on the summit of the hill, he doubted not that he should be able to obtain a very extensive prospect of the surrounding country.

The tree was one easily to be climbed.

As he stood upon the ground, he could reach the lowest branch, and, taking hold of this, he drew himself up with little difficulty.

With great agility, he made his way from bough to bough, until he judged he had reached a height sufficient for his purpose.

Standing upon one of the upper limbs of the tree, and retaining himself in this position by grasping a branch above his head with his left hand, Tom King looked keenly around him.

All, however, as far as he could see—and that was over many a mile of cultivated country—was peaceful and tranquil.

No trace of any human beings resembling those whose approach he had to dread met his view.

He turned round and looked upon the scenery upon all sides of him.

Suddenly his eyes were attracted by a faint glitter.

Looking more closely and earnestly, he perceived, upon a broad road at some distance, a troop of mounted soldiers.

They were those from whom he had so narrow an escape while in the lane; but this he knew not.

He gazed upon them attentively, being anxious to ascertain whether they were approaching or receding.

While in doubt upon this point a sudden turn in the road hid them from his sight, and he saw them no more.

Having made this discovery, he at once prepared to descend the tree.

The soldiers, even if their presence in that sparsely-populated district was connected with them, were so far off that a long time must elapse before they could reach the hill.

During that interval they would, he calculated, have ample time to perform their melancholy duty.

Upon reaching the ground, he found that Sixteen-String Jack had already dug to a considerable depth beneath the surface.

He had found this active exertion to be a relief to his over-wrought feelings.

In a few words Tom made him acquainted with the result of his reconnoitring, and requested him to stand aside for a little while, and he would relieve him in his toil.

This, at first, Jack refused to do, but in the end Tom prevailed upon him to accede to his request.

Tom King then leaped into the grave and commenced turning out the soil with great rapidity, for he knew the sooner the job was over the better it would be, for more reasons than one.

Sixteen-String Jack, meanwhile, had crossed the open space again to where his dead comrade lay.

Again he knelt down by his side, and soon became oblivious of all that was happening around him.

On his side, Tom King was so fully occupied with what he was about, and with his own reflections, that he heard not the stealthy approach of many footsteps, nor yet the occasional crackling of dry twigs, which denoted their progress.

Suddenly, however, there was a loud cry which struck upon the ears of both the highwaymen with startling effect, and, before they could recover from their surprise, they found themselves surrounded by a dense throng of persons.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIII.

TOM KING AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK HAVE A REMARKABLE ADVENTURE IN THE WOOD.

THE first impulse of both the highwaymen, upon making this astounding discovery, was to place themselves in an attitude of defence; but this, they found, they were not capable of doing effectually.

Tom King had his sword already in his grasp, and he held it before him in such a manner as to enable him to ward off a blow. But then he was at a disadvantage.

He was standing in the grave, which was at least three feet deep, and the new-comers surrounded the brink of it in a moment.

He was then completely at their mercy.

As for Sixteen-String Jack, when he left the grave to throw himself upon his knee by the side of Claude's body, he had not even taken his sword with him, but left it sticking up in the ground, near the mound of up-turned soil.

He was then defenceless, and before he could spring to his feet he was completely hemmed in.

Nevertheless, he started up, and, unprovided with the means of defending himself against a host, as he was, he placed himself beside the body of his slain comrade in an attitude to do battle with anyone who approached him too closely.

But the new-comers did not attempt to advance.

They contented themselves with standing round him in a dense throng, and at a respectful distance.

A glance at their forms was sufficient to show both Tom King and Jack that it was not their enemies who had so suddenly made their appearance.

The garb they wore in no way resembled that of either a police-officer or a soldier, though it was quite as distinctive.

The throng was composed both of men and women.

The total number was probably thirty.

There was not one unarmed.

They held in their grasp either a long dagger-like knife, or else a formidable bludgeon.

Their attitudes were threatening in the extreme, though, at the same time, their countenances expressed astonishment.

Then from among the crowd which surrounded Sixteen-String Jack and the body of Claude Duval, a man advanced.

He halted within a few paces of the former, who looked at him with an inquisitive glance.

This man, who stepped forward, seemed to be of an age almost patriarchal.

His hair was silvery white, and hung down over his shoulders in waving masses.

His beard, of the same hue, reached almost to his waist.

But notwithstanding these indications of extreme age, he held his body with great erectness; and it was in the manner of one habituated to command over others that he stood before Sixteen-String Jack.

His face was thin and wrinkled, and of a deep brown tint.

His whole form was very spare, and his great height and erect attitude made this more noticeable than it would have been had his stature been less.

Although in his whole frame there was not a superfluous ounce of flesh, yet all his bones were well covered with muscle, and he was, doubtless, in possession of unusual strength.

With his left hand he grasped a long staff, not unlike the quarter-staff, which was so favourite a weapon with our Saxon forefathers.

His eyes were bright and piercing, and he fixed them with inquiring keenness upon Jack's countenance, who, however, returned his gaze with equal firmness.

The attitude of the remainder of this throng, when the old man stepped forward, was submissive to a degree, and each one fixed his eyes upon him in order to obey the slightest movement he should make.

After bending upon Jack the inquisitive glance, as we have recorded, the old man spoke.

His voice was clear and sonorous, but it had a strong foreign accent.

The tones in which the words were uttered indicated both sternness and displeasure.

"Who are you?" he asked; "and what want you here?"

"Before I reply to that question," said Sixteen-String Jack, boldly, "I must know by what authority you ask it. At present I cannot see what better title you have to be here than myself."

The old man started back in surprise, as though unaccustomed to be spoken to with so little deference.

"What right had you," continued Sixteen-String Jack, "to rush in and surround us as you have done? We were in no way interfering with you."

"Down with him! down with him!" cried the motley crew, accompanying their words with menacing gestures.

The old man held up his hand, and in a moment, as if by magic, everyone became still.

"You speak with little respect," said the old man, addressing Jack. "Do you realize the fact that your life is in my hands, to take at any moment I think proper?"

"I do not. Your numbers are superior to us, and in an encounter we might, probably, be slain; that is, if all of you were cowardly enough to attack two men who have done nothing to provoke your hostility."

"You speak with singular boldness," said the old man, in whose manner Jack fancied he could detect something akin to admiration. "But with regard to having done nothing to provoke our hostility, there you are in error. You have done this."

"How? in what manner?" asked Sixteen-String Jack, in the utmost surprise.

"You have infringed one of our laws, and the penalty of that infringement is death."

"Yes, death!" echoed the wild throng around, and again their gestures became violent and menacing to a degree.

The old man, however, must have exercised over them some singular power, for they grew calm again the moment he uplifted his hand.

Then addressing himself to Sixteen-String Jack, he said—

"You have, doubtless, heard much but know little respecting Zingari—that race which always keeps to itself, and never dwells beneath a roof."

"Gipsies!" ejaculated Jack.

"Such is the name by which you English know us, and it serves as well as any other. But we are Zingaris. Our race is numerous, and we are all bound to each other by bonds we dare not break without incurring the direst consequences."

"But," said Jack, who was now perfectly calm and collected, "what has all this to do with me? Look yonder; surrounded by another portion of your crew, is my companion."

He pointed towards Tom King as he spoke, and all eyes followed the direction of his finger.

"You have taken him at unawares," added Jack.

"You see he is in the earth up to his waist. Your band surround the brink of the pit, and he is unable to effectually defend himself."

"What does he here?" sternly demanded the old man.

"I ask again, by what authority do you put this question?"

"I was about to tell you, but you refused to listen."

"You told me you were gipsies."

"I told you we were a portion of that numerous race, which is dispersed all over England. We are wanderers, and have no place of settled abode; we wander whithersoever our fancy dictates. But we are bound together by universal laws which we are bound to recognise. One of them is, that a member or representative of every family should, once in every nine years, repair to this spot here to meet, to prostrate themselves before their king, and renew their oath of allegiance. This is the appointed and important day, and here, you see, we have assembled."

"But," interrupted Jack, "I"—

"Hear me out," said the old man, interrupting him in his turn. "For centuries immemorial the open space upon the summit of this hill has been the place where this important ceremony has taken place. From those remote ages, of which I have just spoken, a law has descended to us; that law decrees that, should we, on the day in the ninth year when the meeting is to take place, and upon this spot one or more of the house-dwellers,

their lives should pay the forfeit of the intrusion. Now do you understand?"

"I understand your words perfectly well," said Sixteen-String Jack; "but I most resolutely refuse to recognise your power."

"Beware," said the old man, in a stern voice, which was echoed by an angry cry from those who eagerly crowded round.

"Beware of what?"

"I tell you, again, your life is in our hands. By the laws of our race it is forfeit to us."

"It will not be given up without a struggle," said Jack, coolly; "and now, as you have had your say, I must request you to attend to me."

"You are bold."

"Why should I not be? Listen."

The old man felt constrained to do so.

He could not but look upon Jack with admiration at the courage he displayed.

Jack spoke.

"You see this body here," and he pointed to the body of Claude Duval; "I and my companion, pursued by our enemies, brought it to this place, in the hope, first that he was not dead, and then, finding he had ceased to exist, to bury him here. When you abruptly broke upon this spot, you found me kneeling by the side of the corpse, and my companion yonder digging the grave. You outnumber us, but, although such is the case, you need not delude yourself into the idea that we shall tamely submit to be put to death because a sanguinary law has been handed down to you. I give you warning that, if you advance a step further to execute your purpose, I shall defend myself to the utmost, and, though I have little hope of achieving a victory, yet, before I am slain, I shall be able to wreak more mischief upon you than you may consider at all agreeable. And now I have spoken. Do as you think proper."

As he concluded this very daring and defiant speech, Sixteen-String Jack folded his arms across his breast, and gazed calmly upon the crowd of swarthy, angry faces by which he was surrounded.

His address evidently produced a great effect upon the old man, and he remained for a few moments in silent thought.

"You have spoken falsely," he said, at length.

"I have not," returned Jack, angrily.

"I say you have."

"In what particular?"

"That is not a corpse which lies at your feet."

When he heard these words Jack started as though he had been struck by a bullet.

The old man had spoken clearly, and his words reached, with the utmost distinctness, the ears of Tom King, who had also heard the whole of the preceding conversation.

Those around, however, were not prepared for the effect which this last statement had upon him.

He gave one spring, and leaped out of the grave.

So suddenly was this done, that no one was in time to prevent him.

He whirled his sword round his head, and, as they heard the keen weapon whistle through the air, they all instinctively drew back.

In three bounds Tom King was beside Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

He burst through the ring with which they were encircled before a hand could be raised to prevent him.

Then, standing over the prostrate body of his comrade, he cried—

"Who is it that says he is not dead, and by what authority does he make the statement?"

"I say it!" said the old man as he stalked forward a few steps, with a majestic air, "and my authority is the truth. That is not a corpse."

"Do you mean to say, by that, that my comrade is alive?"

"I do."

"Then I thank you from my heart for such a piece of intelligence, though I hardly dare believe it to be true."

"You may rely upon it. My eye is old and dim, perchance, but it does not deceive me."

"Then it was a blessed chance that brought you here," said Sixteen-String Jack, "or we should have consigned him to that most terrible of all fates—a premature interment."

"Is this really so?"

"It is."

"Who are you, then?"

"It would be dangerous to proclaim ourselves, for a price is set upon our heads."

"By the house-dwellers?"

"Yes."

"Then I can spare you. I seek to know no more. Under these circumstances you are clearly no house-dwellers, but outcasts from them. This enables me to set aside the law of which I have spoken, but there is no other person, besides myself, who has the power to do so."

"Accept our thanks, then," said Tom King, seizing him by the hands. "For my own part, I can perceive no signs of vitality about our comrade; but I know your race hold possession of many secrets connected with life and death, and therefore I place reliance upon what you say."

"You may do so safely," said the old man, with a pleased expression of countenance.

"Restore, then, my friend to life," said Tom King, "and ask of me anything you like in return."

"I will do so," said the old man, if only for the courage your companion has exhibited. I must, however, attach one condition."

"You have only to name it for it to be complied with."

"It is that you keep profoundly secret all that has already come under your observation, and all that may futurely do so while you are with us."

"That we promise readily, and it will go hard with us if we do not find some more substantial mode of testifying to our gratitude."

"It is needless," said the old man, who then turned round and addressed some energetic words to those assembled, in a language which was quite unknown to our two friends.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXIV.

THE GIPSY WOMAN RESTORES CLAUDE DUVAL TO CONSCIOUSNESS, AND GIVES UTTERANCE TO A WARNING AND A PREDICTION.

THE whole of the occurrences which we have related at full length in the preceding chapter took place with such rapidity, and were, in themselves, of so bewildering a character, that Tom and Jack found their ideas in a state of great confusion.

By degrees they recovered the use of their faculties, and divided their attention between the body of their companion and the weird-like events which were occurring around them.

They were unable to form the least idea about what the old man said, but, let it be what it would, it met with immediate obedience.

From this, they argued, that the influence of this strange old man was very great indeed.

Like nearly everyone else, Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack had heard plenty about gipsies, and had occasionally encountered them; yet the amount of actual knowledge which they possessed upon the subject was very small indeed.

Of one fact, however, they were well aware, and that was, that certain members of this romantic race were acquainted with strange secrets in the healing art; and that, where wounds were concerned, instances were innumerable where they had effected a cure after the best surgical aid had failed.

This was more particularly the case at the commencement of the last century, when the science of medicine was very far indeed from the position to which it has since attained.

Therefore, although they could not see the least signs of life about Claude, yet they took the old man's word that he was not dead.

Great as might be the authority of the old man, this last command of his, although it was obeyed, was done so reluctantly.

The majority would much rather have obeyed the sanguinary law enforced by their ancestors.

The account which the old man had given of their strange meeting in that place was unquestionably correct.

Once every nine years, in accordance with immemorial custom, one member of each family had to present himself upon this spot, no matter how far he might happen to be distant from it, or what difficulties might intervene.

If any family omitted to send a representative, they were no longer considered as belonging to the true Zingari.

What was the object sought to be attained by this novennial meeting, would be hard to say; doubtless it was intended by the projectors to be a means by which these wanderers might preserve some of the characteristics belonging to distinctive races.

Be the object, however, what it might, it was this novennial meeting which had brought the gipsies together on this occasion.

One more word of explanation, and we have done.

The old man we have so often mentioned occupied the position and title of the king of the Zingari.

This title and position were hereditary, and had been faithfully transmitted from father to son.

As the whole tribe only united once every nine years, it was only on these distant occasions that the king was able to exercise the authority which devolved upon him.

It was probably this circumstance which caused him to be so implicitly obeyed.

The children, too, were taught by their parents, from their tenderest years, to obey the king in all things.

It was a strange fancy for these outcasts to have a king, but doubtless they felt it added to their importance.

The sceptre, however, was a barren one to the possessor of it.

The present king was a man who happened to be gifted by nature with sentiments more human than generally fell to the lot of his subjects; and to this we may attribute his manifest inclination to save the lives of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, as was demonstrated by the readiness with which he twisted the circumstance of their no longer having claim to the title of house-dweller in their favour.

The reader is now in a position to comprehend what follows, and we at once resume.

When the gipsy king had uttered these words of command to his subjects, they dispersed, and no longer showed any manifestations of hostility.

There were many, however, who bent upon our friends a ferocious glance.

The old man now pronounced a single word which sounded like a name—at least, it was the manner in which it was pronounced, more than aught else, which induced this belief in the minds of our friends.

It was confirmed by their shortly afterwards seeing a woman approach, who presented every appearance of extreme age.

She had long outlived the brief space of time allowed for human life.

She supported her steps by means of a stout stick.

She made her way up to the gipsy king, and stood in an attitude of great deference before him, as though awaiting his instructions.

Her whole frame trembled like an aspen in consequence of her extreme age.

Tom King and Jack looked at her with the greatest curiosity and attention.

It was in vain, however, that they listened to the instructions which were given her.

They were uttered in a peculiar language, which might as well have been Greek for all the information which it conveyed to their ears.

The old woman, however, understood them readily enough, since the language in which they were spoken was the dialect of the tribe.

As soon as the old man had finished addressing her she made a deep obeisance, and then, turning round, hobbled towards the spot where Claude Duval still lay upon the ground, and, for aught our friends could tell to the contrary, quite dead.

The old woman knelt down beside him, and, having removed his clothing sufficiently for her purpose, placed her ear upon his heart and listened intently.

Apparently satisfied with this examination, she said something to two young men, who immediately disappeared.

This old woman fulfilled the functions of surgeon-phy-



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE ATTACKED IN THE CAVERN BY THE DRAGOONS.]

ician to the tribe, and was reputed to be possessed of more than ordinary skill in the treatment of wounds and external hurts.

The two young men she had despatched quickly returned, one bringing water and the other some kind of unguent and bandages, such as would be required to dress a wound.

The first thing the woman did was to wash away the mass of coagulated blood, which entirely covered the orifice of the wound from observation.

When this was done, Claude did not present half such a terrible spectacle.

We need not tell the reader with what intentness Tom King and Jack watched every movement.

As soon as the congealed blood was removed, the old woman commenced an examination of the wounds, and by the way she set about doing this, our friends could tell she was no stranger to her work.

A strange cry came from her lips, and she looked up to the countenances of the two highwaymen.

In tolerably good English she said, with the greatest surprise perceptible in her tones,—

"Is it possible you thought him dead?"

"We did, indeed, think so," replied Tom King, "and were filled with grief on that account. But why do you speak in so surprised a manner?"

"Because I cannot account for your having fallen into such a mistake!"

"Mistake?"

"Yes, mistake. It is true he has received a wound from a pistol-shot, but it has done him little harm."

The two highwaymen looked incredulous.

"Speak," they both cried, as with one voice; "explain yourself!"

"See here," said the old woman. "The bullet struck here," and she touched Claude upon the breast as she spoke, "but it did not enter. Of course, had it done so, the wound would have been mortal, but it struck against the bone and then glanced off. It has inflicted a long,

ugly gash, but has really done no further mischief. Owing, perhaps, to some strange position of the body, an immense quantity of blood has flowed from this wound, and your friend now lies in this miserable state for the want of it."

"And is it possible," exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, who hardly dared believe in this sudden reverse of fortune, "is it possible he is in nothing but a swoon from loss of blood?"

"That is all," replied the old woman; "and, if you will leave him in my care, you will soon find him as well as ever he was."

Prepared as he was for this welcome intelligence, Sixteen-String Jack was almost overcome by it.

He had begun to mourn for Claude as dead, and to look upon him as no longer belonging to this life.

To hear that he had only been insensible from loss of blood was, indeed, startling intelligence to our friends.

There was no doubt, however, as to the veracity of what the old woman told them.

They could see for themselves that the bullet had not penetrated his chest, but had struck obliquely upon a bone, and glanced off, leaving a deep gash to mark its course.

From this blood had flowed in prodigious quantities, and it was this immense loss of the vital fluid which produced those appearances which we can scarcely feel surprised at Tom and Jack taking for death itself.

Great, now, was their joy upon receiving so favourable an account of Claude's condition, and they now watched every proceeding of the old woman's with redoubled interest.

Fortunate, indeed, was it for all concerned that this strange encounter with the gipsies had taken place; for, had it not have happened, the probability is Claude Duval would have been buried alive, as the contiguity of the troop of dragons would have caused them to hurry over their melancholy task.

Happily, all this was averted.

Having removed from the wound every morsel of extraneous matter, the old woman dressed it with the ointment which had been brought her.

Then, with surprising skill, she bandaged it up, assuring our friends, as she did so, that the wound, being only a superficial one, would require no further attention, except that the bandages should not be removed until it was thoroughly healed.

All this time, however, Claude Duval remained in the same state of death-like torpor; and how it was the gipsy king had told at glance that he was alive seemed a mystery.

It might be that, in his long life, he had had opportunities of comparing the difference between death and insensibility.

Be that, however, as it may, his statement was proved to be correct.

Having properly attended to the wound, the old woman now proceeded to restore Claude to consciousness.

From the breast of her gown she produced a small bottle of green glass, which was partially filled with some sort of milky-looking liquid.

Removing the stopper, she held the open mouth of the vial close under Claude's nose.

For a moment no effect was produced, but, at the end of that time, the two highwaymen were pleased to perceive a slight movement of the body, and then a faint sigh came from their wounded comrade's lips.

They would have pressed forward and spoken to him, but the old woman would not permit them to approach.

"He is now in a state of extreme weakness, and great caution must be used," she said. "Wait a moment until I have done."

As she spoke, she took up a bottle which had been brought along with the ointment and bandages.

It contained a somewhat thick fluid of a bright crimson colour.

This she suffered to let fall drop by drop into Claude's mouth, who possessed just sufficient strength and sense to swallow these small quantities.

This fluid the old woman continued to administer drop by drop, until the patience of our friends was fairly exhausted; but still she kept on, until the bottle was drained of its last drop.

Next, taking some of the cold water, she caused him to swallow it.

This done, she drew back to watch the effect.

Gradually Claude's eyes closed, and he dropped off into a profound sleep.

When she was sure that the potion had fairly taken effect, the old woman turned round to our two friends and thus addressed them—

"This sleep," she said, "will probably last many hours; I cannot say how many, as that depends entirely upon circumstances. On no account, however, must his slumber be broken. He must be kept perfectly quiet, and allowed to wake of his own accord. When he does this, you will find he has recovered a considerable portion of his lost strength, and it will hourly increase. As for the wound, as that is merely in the flesh, you need not trouble anything further about it. It will get well of itself, and with rest he will soon recover his strength. But the faculty of looking into the future is given to me, and, as you are his friends, bid him, when he awakes, to beware of the next wound he receives, as it will assuredly be a mortal one."

CHAPTER CCLXXXV.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES ONE MORE GLANCE AT THIS WORLD.

It was the peculiar circumstances under which this prediction was uttered that caused it to produce the effect it did upon the minds of Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack.

At any other time they would have laughed at the idea of the old decrepit woman before them having the gift or power of foretelling events—especially if the prediction had been uttered by itself.

But she had been speaking of Claude's condition, and telling them how he would awake; then, more in the manner of a friendly caution than aught else, she uttered the remarkable words with which the last chapter concluded.

As soon as she had spoken she rose to her feet, and, mingling with those assembled, was in a moment lost to sight.

Upon looking around them, our friends found that the number of the gipsies had very much increased during the time that they had been watching the old woman's proceedings, and fresh arrivals kept continually taking place.

Tom and Jack would have mingled with the throng, and singled out the old woman, to whom they wished to give some more substantial token of their gratitude than mere words, but they were prevented by the gipsy king, who placed himself directly in their path.

"Whither go you?" he said.

"To see the woman who has dressed our comrade's wounds, in order that we may reward her for what she has done."

"No reward is required, young man," said the gipsy king. "What she has done has been done freely."

"Still"—

"Attend to me, if you please," interrupted the old man.

"You are here upon sufferance only, and you must be content to do as you are bidden. In the first place, then, you may take my word for it that the condition of your friend is by no means serious, and when he awakes from his sleep he will be almost himself again."

"Those are most welcome words to us," said Sixteen-String Jack, "for we had already mourned for him as one dead, and we are proportionately overjoyed to find that he is yet alive. It is for this reason that we would fain do something to testify our gratitude."

"I am about to afford you an opportunity," said the gipsy king.

"Speak! You have only to tell us what it is, and it will be done."

"In the first place, then, I shall require you to take a solemn oath of secrecy, not only as to what you have witnessed in this place, but all you have been told in explanation; for I need scarcely tell you that the secret of our meeting on this spot is known to no other householders than yourselves."

"We will readily take any oath you may think fit to propose."

"That is well, then. And now, in the second place, although you are here, we cannot allow you to remain and be a witness of the ceremonies which are performed on this occasion. Some of our race will construct a kind of litter of the boughs of these trees, and, placing your

comrade upon it, will carry him to the base of the hill, where you must promise to remain and watch him."

"To all this we readily consent. If you will have the litter constructed, we will carry him down the hill ourselves."

"Nay, nay; for reasons of our own we will do that, too."

The gipsy-king then turned round and addressed a few words of command to some young men who were standing at no great distance.

These the highwaymen conjectured to be connected with the construction of the litter, and such proved to be the case, for the young men set about hastily lopping off several of the lowest branches.

In a very short time they had sufficient for their purpose, and they weaved them into a litter with very great skill indeed.

As soon as it was ready they placed it down by the side of Claude, and, with the greatest care and gentleness, lifted him upon it.

The next thing was to carry it down the hill, which they did with the same amount of care.

Tom and Jack followed it; but not until they had expressed their thanks to the gipsy-king—not only for having saved their lives, but also for his attention to Claude Duval.

Then they freely took the oath which he proposed to them, after having done which, they descended the hill again very willingly, leaving the gipsies to perform their mystic ceremonies unobserved.

Neither of them had forgotten the soldiers which Tom had seen in the distance from the summit of the tree, but so long a time had elapsed since then without their making their appearance, that they very correctly came to the conclusion that they were retreating when they saw them.

The lower part of the hill seemed, then, quite as likely to afford them the shelter they needed as the upper portion of it.

The litter was deposited upon the ground, and Claude was allowed to remain in it.

The horses, too, were then brought down and tethered close at hand.

The gipsies then left them, though not until they had received a reward from our friends.

Tom and Jack watched the gipsies out of sight, and then the former turning to the latter said—

"Well, Jack, I think of all the strange adventures I have ever had, this is the strangest."

"Unquestionably," said Jack. "I never before knew anything like it."

"I have heard many strange things concerning the gipsies, but never anything to surpass or even equal this."

"The most surprising thing is the coincidences," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"In the first place, there was our selecting the wooded hill as our place of concealment; and then, to think that when we arrived there was upon the occasion, in the space of nine years, when the gipsies repair to it."

"It seems more strange the more we reflect upon it."

"It does, indeed; but most of all do I rejoice in the discovery that Claude is still left to be among us. I confess at times I can hardly believe in the reality of such good fortune."

"I am puzzled to think how the gipsy king could have told at a glance the difference between death and a state of insensibility."

"That seems very surprising."

"And he was right."

"Did you notice one thing the old woman said?"

"What? About Claude taking care how he received his second wound?"

"No, that is not what I meant just then."

"What?"

"In speaking of the wound, she said it had bled copiously, but doubtless that the flow of blood had been increased by his body having remained for some time in a position calculated to drain it of blood."

"Yes, she said that."

"And then think of the position in which we found Claude."

"It was certainly just what she seemed to indicate."

"Just. His foot being in the stirrup, and his head

upon the ground, the blood was naturally drained out of his body."

"You must recollect, my friend, that at present we have no idea how it was that Claude came to be in the state in which we found him."

"I know we have not, and we shall have to wait patiently until he wakes before we can know."

"His sleep seems very heavy, almost like death."

"It does, except that you can see he is breathing rather heavily."

"I would give a trifle for a box of the wonderful healing ointment which the old woman carried."

"If its virtues are what she represents, it would be invaluable to us."

"It would, indeed."

"I wonder how long Claude will sleep."

"I know not; but I am certain Dick must be full of alarm and agitation at our non-appearance."

"We must contrive to get back to the chase before daybreak to-morrow morning, or he will be setting out in search of us."

"What time is it now?"

"Noon has passed. It will, however, be six hours, at least, before darkness comes; and let us hope, by that time, Claude will awake and be well enough to accompany us. If we started early in the evening, we could travel slowly, and yet reach the chase before dawn."

"So we could."

"That is what we must hope for, then."

In such conversation as this, the two highwaymen whiled away the time during which they watched by the side of their slumbering companion.

Without some such conversation, the time would have passed slowly indeed; and, as it was, they found it hang rather heavily on their hands.

At length, however, they observed that the shadows of the trees grew rapidly longer, and by this they knew the sun was sinking in the west.

In a short time from now it would be dark enough for them to commence their journey; the only thing was, would Claude awake?

The injunction, not on any account to rouse him from his slumber, was urged upon them with too much earnestness for them to think of disobeying it.

At present Claude showed no signs whatever of awaking.

His sleep seemed as profound as it had been at its commencement.

Anxiously his two comrades looked upon him, as well as the fading light would permit, in the hope of being able to see some signs of returning animation.

But none appeared.

Weary with watching, they at last turned away.

The sun sunk, and the brief autumnal twilight which succeeded quickly deepened into night.

Darkness came over all things, and beneath the shadow of the wide-spreading branches of the trees it was profound, and they were unable to distinguish each others' forms.

Pain would they have lighted a fire with some of the dry brushwood which was lying about, and which they could easily have gathered together, but they feared to do so lest it should prove a beacon to their enemies to show them their whereabouts.

For this reason, then, although they had the means of procuring a light, the fire was not ignited.

As the darkness increased they seated themselves as close as they could to the litter upon which the slumbering form of Claude Duval reposed, in order to be aware, by their sense of hearing, the moment when he awoke.

Their patience was put to a severe trial.

Time glided onward, but still he awoke not, and were it not that in the silence of that place they could occasionally hear his somewhat laboured breathing, they would have fancied he was not sleeping but dead.

A circumstance now occurred which afforded them some consolation.

The moon, which was only a few days past the full, rose majestically from the eastern horizon, and, in a short time, attained to such an altitude that our friends were able to see her silvery face above the tree tops.

The light she shed was clear and beautiful, and once more the form of Claude Duval became revealed to their eager gaze.

Motionless and deathlike he lay, however, as the cold moonbeams poured their lustre upon him.

As they gazed, strange thoughts of the stories they had heard flitted across the minds of the two highwaymen.

They recollected the prevalent and apparently well-authenticated superstitions of the vampire, and the lifeless looking form of Claude Duval, with the pale moonbeams flooding it, was well calculated to recall such a superstition to their recollection.

They had both heard how the dead body of a vampire, should it be exposed to the moonbeams, became restored to a horrible and loathsome vitality; and, as they gazed upon Claude's pallid countenance, they wondered whether the moon's light really did possess resuscitative powers.

Neither spoke, but the same thoughts occupied their minds.

Suddenly both started.

They had observed Claude make a slight movement.

Ashamed of the superstitious ideas which they had permitted to run riot in their brains, they turned round and watched eagerly for some other signs of his awaking.

They soon came.

The effects of the liquid which had been administered to him were rapidly passing away.

Claude's whole frame trembled, and his eyelids fluttered.

At length, with a deep sigh, he awoke.

He started at once into a sitting posture, and looked about him like one bewildered to think where he was.

That feeling, however, immediately subsided when he caught sight of the forms of his old comrades bending over him.

They spoke.

"Lie down again, Claude," they said. "Lie down again for a moment, and collect your thoughts. All is well; we are with you."

Claude laid down again as his companions had requested, and, closing his eyes, endeavoured to collect his scattered thoughts.

For a moment or two he was unable to do this, but, with a rush, a full remembrance of the past came upon him.

In a rather faint tone of voice, he said—

"I have been wounded."

"We know that well enough," replied Sixteen-String Jack, in a cheerful voice; "but your hurt was a slight one, and, by this time, you will perhaps feel little of it."

These words encouraged Claude, and made him feel much better.

With comparative ease he raised himself to a sitting posture, and then became immediately curious to know what had befallen him since he had received his wound.

Mutual explanations rapidly followed, but we need not trouble the reader with a detail of them, since every incident has been related.

When they had come to an understanding with each other, Tom and Jack expressed their wish to return to Enfield Chase with as little delay as possible, because of the anxiety which Dick Turpin would experience.

Claude was equally desirous to return, and declared that he could feel himself grow stronger every moment.

If this really was the case, and he did not allow his fancy to deceive him, the draught administered by the gipsy must have been a potent and invaluable restorative.

Claude, indeed, was willing to start at once, but his two comrades urged him to remain a little longer where he was, in order to recover himself as thoroughly as possible.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL, TOM KING, AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK REACH ENFIELD CHASE IN SAFETY, AND DICK TURPIN HAS A SLIGHT ALARM.

HALF-an-hour quickly passed away in pleasant conversation upon the events that had recently taken place, and, at the end of that time, Claude Duval expressed his impatience to commence the journey.

It is quite certain, however, that his recovery from that looked so much like certain death, was little less than miraculous, and so his friends considered it.

As for Claude himself, of course he had no due appre-

ciation of the amount of danger through which he had passed, and, finding himself tolerably well, he immensely overrated his strength.

This is nothing to be surprised at, since those who have been sick almost invariably do so.

He would have mounted his horse and set off at a trot, but his two comrades had too great an amount of prudence to permit him to do any such thing.

They assisted him into the saddle, however, for he would insist that he was strong enough to ride.

Tom and Jack determined on no account to go any faster than at a walking pace.

This they doubted not he would be able to accomplish, for it could scarcely be said to fatigue anyone.

Having seen him properly seated in the saddle, his two companions mounted their horses, and the little party at once emerged from the wood.

The moon was shining with extraordinary brightness in a sky which was not even speckled by a single cloud.

Although her light had been so useful to them such a short time ago, they would now willingly enough have dispensed with it altogether.

This, however, they were unable to do.

Tom and Jack both judged it expedient not to approach the road upon which they had discovered the body of Claude, for fear suspicion should be attached to them.

Accordingly, after having carefully noted their position, they made their way in almost a straight line for their destination.

The only times when they deviated from a direct course was when they encountered some insurmountable obstacle which compelled them to do so.

This was a kind of travelling with which our friends were familiar, and, in spite of occasional detours, they lost very little ground indeed.

The pace at which they went, however, was one that took them a long while to go a short distance, but they soon perceived how wisely they had acted in adopting it, or their wounded comrade would have been completely overcome.

He found his strength had rapidly evaporated, and it now required him to make continual efforts to retain an upright position on the back of his steed.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack noticed this, but said nothing.

Efficacious in such cases as the gipsy's cordial unquestionably was, still it was hardly to be supposed that it would supply the place of the immense quantity of blood which Claude Duval had lost.

Nevertheless, its effects were wonderful, or he would never have been able to travel in the manner he had.

At length, to the satisfaction of all three, Enfield Chase appeared in the distance.

Its immense size, and the circumstances from portions of it being at a considerable elevation above the surrounding country, made it a conspicuous object for many miles.

The bright moonbeams on that night made it visible at a great distance.

The sight of his destination seemed to have a strengthening and invigorating effect on Claude Duval, and he sat more erectly in the saddle.

Right glad would he be when the journey was over.

As, however, the chase, although in sight, was still a long way off, and as they would, on account of the slowness of their progress, be a long time in reaching it, they propose a halt, to which Claude only assented with great reluctance.

Happening to be in a very lonely and unfrequented part of the country, Tom and Jack felt there would be little risk in halting for some time.

Not only would Claude regain fresh strength by the rest, but they should still have ample time to reach the appointed spot before daybreak.

The place they had chosen for their halt was far away from any public road or private footpath, and they seated themselves and tethered their horses in the deep shadow of a hedgerow.

Here they had little fear of being seen.

Sixteen-String Jack produced a flask of spirits, of which he compelled Claude to partake very sparingly.

The small quantity he drank acted upon his body as a stimulant, and endowed him with fictitious vigour.

Still, he did not drink enough to produce any ill effect. Their halt was a short one, but this was principally

upon Claude's account, who manifested extreme impatience to recommence his journey.

Once again, then, in compliance with his urgent wishes, the trio mounted their steeds and set out towards the chase.

It was encouraging for them to be able thus to see the termination of their journey.

Much time was occupied in speculation as to the effect which their long absence would be likely to have upon Dick Turpin.

All hoped that he had not been tempted to set out in search of them.

As the three highwaymen are not likely to meet with any interruption or further incident during the remainder of their journey, we will leave them slowly approaching the chase, and occupy ourselves in relating the proceedings of Dick Turpin.

In a former chapter we have described how, after their perilous adventure with the serpent in the cavern, Maud and our hero had made their way to the spot which had been appointed for a meeting place.

Here they watched the faint light of the new day gently steal through the trees, and gradually bringing all things into view; but, though they listened intently, and waited patiently, they could not hear anything to indicate the approach of the three highwaymen.

The extent of Dick's anxiety upon their account can be imagined; but, when the sun rose, and the day fairly passed away without the least symptoms of their return, he was in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

Although he did not for a moment think that his three comrades would venture to approach or enter the chase during daylight, yet Maud could not induce him to quit the spot upon which he knew they would first appear.

During the whole day he manifested his agitation by pacing the green sward, with rapid and unequal strides. At length, to his relief, the sun set, though his impatience had made him think that that event would never come to pass.

Never had a day appeared of such tremendous length.

As the sun declined behind the bank of clouds on the western horizon, and the faint twilight crept over the scene, Dick's impatience, so far from abating, increased.

Nothing but the fact of Maud's presence in the chase, and the impossibility either of leaving her in it or taking her with him, would have had the effect of causing Dick to remain in the same spot all day like he did.

Indeed, now, the impulse to mount his bonny mare, and sally forth in quest of his absent comrades, was so strong as almost to be irresistible.

He, however, possessed sufficient strength to struggle with, if he did not overcome, the feeling.

Maud's anxiety was scarcely less than Dick's, and most fervently did she hope that the three highwaymen would rapidly return.

Her left hand was resting lightly on Dick's arm, and both had their attention fixed and their countenances turned in the direction in which they expected them to come.

Every moment Dick grew less and less able to control himself.

The twilight passed away, and was succeeded by the darkness of night.

Still no signs of his comrades.

Somehow the idea had taken hold of his mind, almost from the first, that they had fallen into the hands of the police.

Perhaps, at that very moment, when he stood there so vainly watching and waiting for them, they were all three confined in some place of strength and security.

This was a reflection that maddened him, and, the more he pondered over the idea, the more convinced he became that it must be the actual state of affairs.

He was well aware that, if they had all three been taken prisoners, they would have had neither the means nor the opportunity of communicating that unpleasant fact to him. All, then, was uncertainty and doubt.

Suddenly he felt Maud's hold upon his arm increase to a degree of tightness almost painful, while she clung close to him, convulsively.

Surprised at this incident, he forgot for the moment the harassing thoughts which had so long held possession of his mind, and questioned her eagerly as to the cause of the alarm she exhibited.

Instead of replying to his question, however, Maud only clung still closer to him, and implored him, with the greatest anxiousness, to be silent.

He looked around, as well as the dim light would permit him, but no alarming object met his view.

"Speak, Maud," he said. "Speak. Tell me at once, I implore you, the cause of this alarm."

"Hush! hush!" replied Maud, in accents of the utmost terror, but in a voice so faint that it could not have reached any other ears than those for which it was intended. "Hush! hush! Do not speak so loud."

"Tell me, then, the meaning of this sudden alarm," said Dick, who sank his voice until it became a faint whisper.

"Tell me. It may be of the utmost importance." "I fear we are observed," said Maud, glancing around her in extreme terror, as though she every moment expected her eye to rest upon some terrible object.

Dick started.

Her alarm was too great for it to be unreal.

Like a flash of light he drew his sword, and stood upon the defensive, with his arm encircling Maud's waist.

"You fear we are observed?" he said, repeating her words. What grounds have you for such a dread? In this place we are alone."

"No—no," said Maud, in the same low, whispering tones; "we are not alone."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I thought—"

"What, dearest? Tell me, I pray you. Keep me no longer in this dreadful state of suspense."

"I thought I heard a faint rustling among the bushes."

"What, again?"

"Yes, again; and the sound was precisely similar to that which I heard this morning."

"Ah! say you so?"

"Yes."

"You describe it then as though some one was endeavouring to creep through bushes as silently as possible."

"Yes—yes; that is the sound."

"And you have heard it again?"

"Yes—yes."

"When?"

"This moment; when I pressed your arm."

"Indeed!" said Dick, and, as he spoke, he looked around him as well as the dim light enabled him.

But he could see nothing and hear nothing save the murmuring sound which is always audible where trees grow together in large quantities.

"This is most serious," he added. "Are you quite sure you were not mistaken?"

"Quite."

"But I heard nothing."

"Nor did you this morning."

"I know I did not."

"That, then, is because, perhaps, your faculties are so absorbed by thinking of your comrades."

"Perhaps so. But this matter is serious in the extreme; and you must give me all the information in your power. Be under no apprehension, however. I am with you; and let the danger be what it may, all will be well."

"For me, perhaps, but not for you; and it is on account of your safety that I feel alarm, and not on my own."

Dick pressed her still closer to him, as he said—

"But this sound which you have heard, and which has caused you so much alarm? Tell me all respecting it, for I can assure you I heard nothing."

"I did, and I am sure I am not mistaken. It was as though some person was endeavouring to crawl through the underwood without his progress being heard."

Dick's face became more anxious.

"When I heard the sound," continued Maud, "I grasped you by the arm, and no sooner had I done so, than"—

"What—what? Oh! what!"

"I distinctly saw some dark object move."

"Where?—where?"

"Yonder, among those bushes."

Dick looked in the direction in which she pointed, but could see nothing.

"The object I saw is no longer there," said Maud.

"What was it like?"

"It was gone too soon for me to be able to say for certain, but I thought it was like the head of a man."

"Release me a moment," said Dick. "This must be looked into."

As he spoke these words, he somewhat rudely disengaged himself from the hold which Maud kept upon him. Sword in hand, he dashed among the bushes which grew where Maud had pointed.

With a faint scream she started after him, for she feared he would receive some injury.

Dick laid about him most vigorously with his sword, and plunged it into every bush, but without encountering any obstacle.

He continued his exertions in spite of Maud's entreaties, until he had searched all around him for a considerable distance.

He met with nothing to reward him for his trouble, and at length he ceased his fruitless search.

He could not help feeling somewhat alarmed at what Maud had told him.

He feared some of his foes were upon his track, and taking steps to encompass his destruction.

He would have been much better pleased if he could have fallen across some animal which would have caused Maud's alarm, but his being unable to find anything filled him with uneasiness and made him dread the worst.

Over and over again he questioned his fair companion, but he was still unable to come to any conclusion.

He resolved to be more attentive, and to keep his ears open to catch the slightest sound.

It was not long before he heard a slight noise, which each moment increased in loudness.

"That is not the same sound as I heard before," said Maud.

As she spoke, Dick's practised ear told him that the noise he heard was caused by horses' feet.

He grasped his sword tightly by the hilt, and held Maud in such a position that he should be able to defend her should an encounter take place.

On came the horsemen—nearer and nearer, until at length three mounted horsemen presented themselves before him.

CHAPTER CCCLXXXVII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS TWO COMRADES HAVE A CONVERSATION UPON A SUBJECT OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.

So entirely was Dick Turpin's attention occupied by this fresh incident, that for the time being he became quite oblivious of the fact that the reason he was waiting there was that he was in expectation of the return of his comrades.

As the reader has no doubt surmised, the three horsemen, who so suddenly made their appearance, were no other than our old acquaintances, Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

Dick Turpin, when he heard them coming, connected the sound which they made in their approach with the cause of Maud's alarm, and the attitude in which they found him was a very hostile and threatening one.

His comrades looked all the surprise they felt, but Dick, perceiving in a moment the mistake he had made, flung down his sword, and, springing forward, greeted them warmly.

He overwhelmed them with questions as to the cause of their late appearance, but Tom, bidding him be patient, said he would relate all at the first opportunity.

So saying, he and Sixteen-String Jack sprang nimbly off their steeds, and then going towards Claude Duval, assisted him to alight.

This was the first intimation Turpin had that his comrades had met with a misfortune, and again he addressed a dozen eager questions, but all the information he could gather was that Claude had been wounded.

The remainder of the journey of the three highwaymen to the chase after we last saw them was, as we had anticipated, performed without the occurrence of any particular incident, and without their encountering a single human being.

At times a dreadful sensation of weakness and exhaustion would come over Claude, but on each occasion he rallied his failing energies by the thought that he had now only a short distance to go.

As we have seen, he gained the chase in safety.

Tom King took charge of the horses, and led them off by the bridle, while Sixteen-String Jack supported the steps of Claude Duval.

Dick Turpin and Maud brought up the rear.

The dawn of the new day was not far distant, and they debated whether they should enter the cavern or remain in the open air.

Dick, who knew the disagreeable sight which would be presented to them when they entered it, briefly described his adventure and encounter with the serpent.

The information that the cavern was frequented by such creatures was received by the three highwaymen with anything but pleasurable emotions.

It was only reasonable to suppose that where one had been seen there were others not very far distant.

Such companions as these they had a decided objection to, and they already exhibited a reluctance to re-enter the cavern.

Their unwillingness, however, was overruled by Claude Duval, who complained that his limbs were cramped with cold, and that he must have a fire to warm himself.

This decided the matter at once, and, overcoming their very natural repugnance, they bent their steps in the direction of the entrance.

At a word, however, from Dick Turpin, Tom King, having disposed of the horses, made his way into the cavern first, in order to remove, as well as he could, the disagreeable evidences which remained there of the creature's presence.

Dick and Maud held back until informed by Tom that all was ready, and that they might enter.

It was no wonder Claude complained of the cold.

He was in a condition now to be more than usually susceptible of its effects.

A keen east wind swept through the forest, and that dampness which always prevails soon after daybreak seemed to increase its chillness.

As the wind blew upon them, it seemed to be laden with minute aqueous particles, of icy coldness.

The whole of the party, then, having been for some time subjected to it, felt the shelter of the cave to be very welcome and desirable.

Of course, the fire which Dick had left burning so many hours ago was extinct, and all traces of its warmth had dissipated; but Tom King had already heaped another pile of fuel on the hearthstone and ignited it.

Little more than smoke proceeded from it at present, but that state of things would soon be altered.

Claude Duval, who, now that all excitement was over, felt his weakness momentarily increase, was temporarily placed by Sixteen-String Jack upon a rude bench.

Leaving his side, he made his way to one of the inner chambers, and quickly returned with as many of the deer-skins as he could carry.

These he laid smoothly upon the floor of the cavern, near the fire, in such a manner as to form a comfortable enough couch.

Upon this Claude was placed.

By the time this was done, the fire had begun to burn up and to diffuse a cheerful light and warmth around it.

The excitement of their meeting having now subsided, the cravings of nature began to make themselves felt.

All were hungry, but they were not at first able to see how their appetites should be appeased.

There was nothing whatever in the cave of an estable character, so an excursion into the chase was imperative.

The matter was finally adjusted in this manner.

Claude Duval, whose weakness proceeded in a great measure from hunger, was clearly not competent to accompany them; so he was left upon his couch of deer-skins by the fireside.

Maud was to remain with him, and replenish the fire when requisite.

Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack equipped themselves for a hunting expedition, and set forth in order to obtain something comestible which would serve them for a breakfast.

There was little fear that they would be any longer away than they were compelled, for they were almost famished.

Then they would not be likely to be detained in consequence of the scarcity of game.

Indeed it was more than probable that they would be

able to obtain what they required immediately upon gaining the entrance of the cavern.

Such, however, on the present occasion was destined not to be the case.

Maud showed great unwillingness to part with Dick, but the thought that he was not going far away, and would not be absent long, somewhat reconciled her to it.

Upon entering the chase, after having carefully concealed the entrance to the cave, Dick Turpin demanded from his two comrades a full account of all that happened since they last parted with each other.

This they were well able to do: and as Claude had told them all that happened to himself, they were in a position to present Dick with a tolerably well-connected account of all that had taken place.

With all this the reader is acquainted.

It was not, however, until this relation was fairly over that they thought in good earnest of the errand upon which they had been sent, and they now began to look about them for game of some description.

There was a considerable risk in firing a pistol, as they well knew, but there was no hope of their being able to avoid doing so.

In tramping through the bushes, a large deer suddenly started up, and set off at full speed.

Two young fawns were with her, and hastily aiming at one, Dick fired.

The shot was a true one.

The bullet did its work, and the pretty, innocent looking creature, which it really seemed an act of cruelty to slay, rolled over and over upon the turf, mortally hurt.

The mother of the fawn, perceiving what had taken place, stopped suddenly short in her course and bounded to its side.

The speedy approach of our three friends, however, startled it away.

This was a lucky shot, and the purpose with which they set out having been fully accomplished by it, Tom King slung the little creature over his shoulder, and they bent their steps towards the cavern, from which, while so occupied with conversation, they had strayed much further than they were aware of.

The fawn was now quite dead, and as it was a very young one its weight was inconsiderable, and Tom carried it with ease.

On their way back Dick spoke in a rather serious tone of voice to his comrades.

It was unlike the mode in which he generally addressed them, and in consequence it commanded their instant attention.

"My friends," said Turpin, "during your absence something has occurred with which it is necessary that you should be made acquainted, and when I have told you what this is, I shall expect to receive your advice upon the matter."

This commencement filled his two comrades with curiosity, and they impatiently requested him to begin.

"It may be," continued Dick, "that this may turn out to be an unimportant affair, but there is doubt in it, and where there is doubt with us there is danger."

His companions assented.

"Early yesterday morning, after the adventure with the serpent in the cavern, which I have already related to you, Maud and myself made our way towards the spot at which I expected you to arrive. Just as we reached it, Maud started suddenly, and asked me whether I had heard anything? I replied in the negative, and at the same time inquired what kind of sound she had heard? She described it as though some persons were creeping through the bushes, and endeavouring to do so without being heard."

Tom and Jack both started.

The matter was more serious than they had imagined.

Dick continued to speak with great rapidity.

"Knowing how much she had been alarmed such a short time before, I fancied she must have deceived herself as to the character of the sound, which probably was one common to the forest. Under this impression I soothed her as well as I could, and, having succeeded in calming her apprehension, I thought no more about the matter. Just before your arrival, however, and while we were standing almost on the same spot, I felt Maud suddenly clinging to my arm with great violence, turning towards her, I found her whole countenance

exhibiting the utmost terror. Upon inquiring what had alarmed her, she informed me that she had been startled by a repetition of the sound she had previously heard, and, in addition, she had seen some dark object among the bushes move suddenly, which she fancied was the form of a man. This was sufficient to alarm me. I could not believe that she had been twice led into the same error. At my request, she pointed out the particular spot from which the sound had appeared to come, and where she had seen the figure move. Sword in hand, I rushed in that direction, and searched the underwood narrowly around. I could, however, find nothing. Just then I heard you approaching. It was only natural that I should connect this sound with what had so recently taken place, and this will account for the attitude in which, to your surprise, no doubt you found me."

This communication, which Dick thus made to them, was of so important a character, that they forebore to interrupt him, but listened with the utmost attention to all he had to say.

When he had finished, Tom King said—

"This is, indeed, a strange affair, and my heart mis-gives me much respecting it."

"What do you think, then?" asked Dick.

"I dread the worst."

"So do I," coincided Sixteen-String Jack.

"It seems, then, that we are unanimous," said Turpin.

"You may depend," said Tom King, "that in some mysterious way or other our place of retreat has been discovered. Maud, no doubt, is right; and what she heard was some spy stealing cautiously through the bushes, and endeavouring to hear your conversation."

"If such is the case," said Turpin, "and I fear what you say is only too correct, the sooner we leave this place the better it will be for us."

"I do not quite agree with you," said Sixteen-String Jack.

"Why not?"

"Because you have nothing like proof that all this is correct. The sounds Maud has doubtless heard might easily have been produced by some harmless denizen of the chase, and it would be vexations if we were driven from a secure retreat by the mere shadow of danger."

"You are right, Jack; but what do you propose should be done?"

"In the first place, that we lose no time in returning to the cavern; and, in the second, that we take no active steps in the matter until we receive some more definitive intelligence than we are in possession of. We can be vigilant. The apprehended danger may pass away, but let things be how they may, we cannot improve our position by leaving the chase."

CHAPTER CCLXXXVIII.

TOM KING DETECTS THE SPY, AND DICK TURPIN COMMANDS HIS IMMEDIATE EXECUTION.

THE view which Sixteen-String Jack had taken of this rather puzzling question was a common one, and the conclusions to which he came were of such a rational character that they at once convinced his two auditors that nothing better could be done at present than to use extra vigilance, and be guided entirely by what events happened in the future.

Having come to this determination, the hearts of all three became lighter, and they made their way back to the cavern as rapidly as they could.

Upon their arrival, they found Claude Duval and Maud anxiously awaiting their return.

In the best manner they could the fawn was dressed and cooked, and in a short time they had quite a tempting meal before them.

Not in the length and breadth of all England could five persons be found who sat down to a meal with a keener relish.

While it was discussed not a word was said respecting their late conversation.

There was nothing better than water to wash down the delicious viand, but of this there was plenty of excellent quality.

This was an inconvenience which they could easily put up with.

The effect of this meal upon Claude was really astound-

ing, and it was now the extraordinary virtues of the medicine that he had taken began to manifest themselves.

He grew rapidly stronger, until at length, when the meal was concluded, he declared that he had never felt better in his life.

His comrades advised him, however, not to try his strength too far.

He, however, laughed at their caution, and stated that he felt nothing but a slight soreness from his wound.

Lightly and cheerfully they talked about their past and future dangers, and, for a time, all was merriment.

It was destined to be of short duration.

A sharp, crackling noise, which was heard plainly above other sounds, startled them all.

Tom King was the first to spring to his feet.

He drew his sword.

His actions were rapidly imitated by his companions, upon whose faces wonderment was most visibly impressed.

The sound which startled them evidently came from the passage which led from the cavern into the open air.

"I know the meaning of that sound," said Tom King, speaking rapidly; "our worst suspicions are confirmed. Some one has entered the passage. I am sure of it, because I took the precaution when we came in just now to place several dry twigs just inside the entrance to the passage. Some one has trodden upon them. That is the explanation of the sounds we have heard."

These words produced an electrical effect.

No sooner had he spoken than Tom King, with the velocity of an arrow, rushed down the passage.

His companions were close behind him.

In his excitement, Claude Duval forgot all about his having received a wound.

Upon reaching the end of the passage, there appeared every confirmation of the truth of what Tom King had said.

When, a short time before, they had passed through the secret opening in the rocks, Tom had handed the fawn to Dick, while he replaced the bush in its proper position.

It was while doing this that the thought occurred to him that he might as well adopt some simple means which would inform them at once if any other person attempted to enter the cavern.

For this purpose he had, as he had hastily stated, placed several dry twigs just within the passage, in such a position that one of them could not fail to be trodden upon, the immediate result of which would be a snap of sufficient loudness to reach his ears.

This had evidently happened, and he had reason to congratulate himself upon his forethought in putting such a scheme into execution.

Upon reaching the end of the passage, instead of things presenting the same appearance as they did when he left them, the bush was found drawn away and trampled upon the ground.

Not heeding this, the highwaymen gave one bound and were in the open air.

The first thing that struck their notice was a rustling sound, and a commotion among the bushes at a little distance.

They rushed in that direction, but, before they could reach the spot, they saw a man spring to his feet and run rapidly across the chase.

They commenced a pursuit immediately; and how it would have terminated would have been hard to tell, had not the flying man, in his blind speed, caught his foot against the root of a tree, which projected rather above the ground.

The result of this was that he measured his full length upon the turf, and, before he could regain his feet, the highwaymen were upon him.

All three seized him, and compelled him to rise.

The man trembled in every limb.

Our friends looked at him with curiosity.

He was dressed in a very ragged suit of clothes, but there were several things connected with them which at once convinced the highwaymen that they were merely donned for the purposes of disguise.

This man had evidently been set by some one as a spy upon their actions, but he had incautiously betrayed himself.

To this conclusion they unanimously came.

Here, then, was no doubt the explanation of the slight sounds which the quick ear of Maud had caught, and which she fancied were produced by some one stealing stealthily among the bushes.

She was unquestionably right.

In a stern voice Dick Turpin addressed himself to this man.

"Who are you?" he asked; "what want you here?" The man endeavoured to put on an air of determination, and to brazen it out.

"What's that to you?" he said; "I have as much right to be here as you."

"I should advise you to be a little more civil," said Claude Duval, "or it may be the worse for you."

"Answer me at once," said Dick; "tell me what you are doing here!"

"That's my business."

"You will find it concerns me as well as yourself."

"Shall I? I don't see that. This ere chase is as free to me as it is to you."

"That may be; but why were you stealing into the cavern?"

"That's my business."

"Then am I to understand by that that you refuse to give any account of yourself?"

"Yes—for I don't see why you ought to ask it."

All the time this little conversation had been going forward the man had been fumbling with his hands after something.

Our friends still retained their grasp upon him, but allowed him this much liberty, for they were curious to know what he was about to do.

The reader may be sure that not one of his motions escaped the observation of the highwaymen, by whom he was held captive.

With great suddenness, this man, after fumbling in the breast of the coat he wore, produced a bugle.

With a wrench, he freed his arm sufficiently to enable him to place this to his lips.

Another moment and he would have, doubtless, produced a loud note from the instrument; but ere he could command his breath to do so, Tom King dashed it from his hand.

"Ho! ho! my fine fellow," he said. "You are a dangerous customer, I see, but we know you now."

The man groaned and gnashed his teeth with rage at being prevented from giving this signal with the bugle.

He was defeated, and he made the most desperate exertions to get free.

It was in vain, however.

The grasp by which our friends held him was too tight a one to be shaken off very easily.

His struggles were futile.

The aspect of affairs was becoming serious, far more serious, in fact, than they had imagined.

Dick was resolved to obtain all the information he could from this man.

There was but one way by which he could hope to succeed in this design, and that was by threatening to take his life.

In his struggles with Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, a portion of his clothing had been dragged aside, and Turpin now perceived that round his waist this man had got a quantity of strong rope coiled.

For what purpose this was intended he was at a loss to think, though Dick was aware that police-officers occasionally provided themselves in this manner when out upon any dangerous service, in case rope should be required to securely bind their prisoners.

But there was something about this man's appearance which was quite unlike that presented by a police-officer, and Dick came to the conclusion that he did not belong to that fraternity.

As soon as he spied the rope, our hero hastened up to the man, and, taking hold of it, quickly unwound it.

The spy looked at him apprehensively.

The piece of rope was a good length; and Dick, finding he had plenty to serve his ulterior purpose, drew his sword and cut off a portion of it.

He then beckoned to Claude to assist him, while he said to his two other comrades—

"Hold him firmly, my friends, and we will pinion his arms behind him with this convenient bit of rope."



[THE DRAGOONS KEEP WATCH FOR THE HIGHWAYMEN IN THE OLD CAVERN.]

he has been kind enough to furnish us with, and then you will not have so much trouble with him."

Claude advanced, and, with Turpin's assistance, they quickly tied the spy's arms securely behind his back.

To hold him then became a comparatively easy matter.

"Now," said Dick, "once for all, and all for once, will you tell us your business in this wood?"

"I will not."

"What was your intention when you tried to blow that bugle?"

"I decline to say."

"Very well, then. The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing."

The spy looked at Dick suspiciously as he uttered this rather enigmatical speech.

But he was not for long left in doubt as to what he meant by it.

Dick Turpin now stooped down, and picked up the largest piece of rope.

The spy watched him eagerly.

His first proceeding was to make a running noose in it.

He did this with great deliberation.

Having tied the knot to his entire satisfaction, Dick looked round for a tree which had a good stout projecting branch not many feet from the ground.

In Enfield Chase he had not to look far to find a tree of this description.

Indeed, he was standing within two yards of one, which could not have done better if it had been made on purpose.

Coiling the rope round his hand, Dick swung it backwards and forwards several times, and then, having taken his aim, threw it over the arm of the tree.

The first time he did not succeed in his object, but he did the second.

He pulled the rope, and, finding it all right, he cried to his comrades—

"Lead the prisoner this way, and we will soon see whether he will speak or not."

The man attempted a resistance, but he felt it was so utterly useless, that he gave in at once, and reluctantly suffered himself to be led to the tree.

Dick held that end of the rope which had the noose in it, and, as soon as the man was led beneath the tree he dropped the noose over his head.

With one snatch he drew it just tight enough for the man to feel what was round his neck.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack did not require to be told to take hold of the other end of the rope.

They did that at once.

Then Turpin stood back a few paces.

Addressing the man, he said—

"I am willing to give you a chance for your life, but the only means by which it can be spared will be by your disclosing your true object in stealing into the cavern."

"I tell you that's no business of yours."

"Very well, then; all I can say is you must perish in your obstinacy. I shall give you three minutes to make up your mind. If, at the end of that time, you do not think fit to make a full disclosure, I shall give the word of command to those who hold the rope, and up you will go at once! Now, understand, you have three minutes to decide whether you will be hanged, or whether you will give me the information I require."

Dick spoke these words in a very resolute and menacing tone, and the man looked at him furtively, as though anxious to ascertain whether he was in earnest.

But Dick's countenance was stern, and fully corroborated with the words he had just uttered.

Turning to Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack, Dick said—

"Be prepared, comrades, to swing him up the moment I utter the word 'now.' You need not wait for any further instructions, but pull him up at once, for we have no time to spare, and the sooner this job is over the better."

"All right, captain," was the reply, given with great readiness, and willingness too the man thought, and he glared around him with increased apprehensiveness.

"Time is speeding," said Dick; "that you are a spy, I feel convinced, and with your object I am pretty well acquainted, but I desire some more definite information than I possess. Quick, tell me, and spare your miserable life."

"I have nothing to tell," said the man, doggedly.

"That may be a misfortune, and it may be a fault. Anyhow, I am sorry for it, for if you do not tell me what I want to know, up you will go."

The man was silent.

"Will you tell me, or will you not? I ask you now for the last time."

"I have nothing to tell."

"Very well; I am sorry for that. Now, my comrades, up with him!"

CHAPTER CCLXXXIX.

THE SPY CONSENTS TO SAVE HIS LIFE BY MAKING A FULL CONFESSION.

ALTHOUGH the tone in which Dick Turpin had spoken was so firm and decided, that the spy felt sure he was in earnest, yet the reader, from his knowledge of our hero's character, may almost feel certain that it was never his intention to murder this man in cold blood—for, had he swung him up to the bough of the old tree, by no other name could the deed be designated.

Such a proceeding as this was entirely foreign to Dick's nature; and this his comrades well knew, although the spy was ignorant of it.

Thus was it, then, that, even after his injunctions, the command he had given was not put into immediate execution.

Dick had not communicated his precise intentions, but they knew quite well how they were to act without his doing so.

Accordingly, the moment their captain spoke, they, with great apparent good earnest, gave the rope a sudden jerk, which tightened it in a most uncomfortable manner round the spy's throat.

At this manifestation, which seemed remarkably real and earnest, the man altered his mind about holding his peace.

He deemed that, in another second, a vigorous pull at the rope would lift him completely off his legs.

When that was once done, it would be out of his power to speak, no matter how much he might then wish to save his life by making a full disclosure.

Instantly, then, he bawled out that he would tell all if they would only spare his life.

This was enough, and exactly what Dick Turpin required.

He made a signal to his three comrades with his hand, which they immediately understood.

They slackened the rope, and the man, with chattering teeth and rolling eyes, again implored them to spare his life.

His close proximity to death had frightened him exceedingly.

At first he had thought his life was not in danger, but the apparent earnestness of our friends deceived him.

"As I told you," said Turpin, still speaking as resolutely as before, "you have a chance of your life, if you only like to avail yourself of it. The only condition upon which your life can be spared is, that you at once disclose your object in creeping about the chase, and stealing into the cavern."

"And if I do this you will spare my life?"

"Most certainly; I pledge you my word to that effect."

"Take the rope off my neck, then."

"Not just at present, my friend. In order to guard against the possibility of future trouble, we will just listen to what you have got to say with the rope still round your neck."

While Dick spoke these words, the spy looked very eagerly all round him, on every side, and assumed, at the same time, a listening attitude, as though he was in expectation either of seeing or hearing something which would benefit him in his present strait.

This was not lost upon the highwaymen, and they continued to observe his countenance attentively.

They then perceived that it became clouded with disappointment.

"Come," said Dick, again, "if you are going to make us any disclosures, speak at once, for we cannot afford to waste time by remaining here. Either speak or not, just as you please. We shall not dally, I assure you; so, you have your choice of life or death before you, and we cannot be blamed if you choose the latter."

"What do you want to know?"

"That you have already been told. Will you give us the information we require, or not? If you won't, up you go."

By way of a comment upon what Dick had just said, Tom King jerked the rope again to the dismay of the spy, who thought he was going to be lifted off his feet.

"I will tell you!" he yelled. "I am a telling you. Do not hang me up. Let go of the rope. I am telling you, I tell you!"

The rope was slackened again.

"I know you all four," continued the spy, now speaking with great volubility, and pointing successively to the highwaymen in the order indicated by the following—

"You are Dick Turpin, you are Tom King, you are Claude Duval, and you are Sixteen-String Jack."

"You are quite correct," said Dick, who took upon himself to reply for his comrades; "but does it not strike you that it is a very dangerous piece of information for you to avow yourself in possession of?"

The spy looked at him uneasily.

"You have promised to spare my life," he said, at length.

"True, true," replied Turpin, as though suddenly reflecting himself. "Go on. You know us; but what else? We wish to hear something about you."

"I suppose you are aware," said the man, "that the military have been called out in quest of you?"

"No, I did not know it," exclaimed Dick, who was betrayed into this admission by the surprise which the unexpected piece of intelligence occasioned him.

"Then, if you don't know that," said the spy, "I suppose you are not aware that there is a reward of a hundred pounds for anyone who can give any precise information as to your whereabouts."

"Proceed," said Dick. "What of that?"

"There is such a reward offered, and I can tell you a good many have been trying to earn it, but no one has succeeded as yet. You must understand it don't apply to

any way to your capture, but the money will be given to any one who can lead the military to where you are."

"Oh! indeed. Then I suppose this will account for your presence here?"

"Well, it might."

Answer me at once, and decisively; is this what brought you here?"

"It was."

"That will do; I know what to make of such answers as those. And now, then, there is something else. How came you to know we were here?"

"I thought this was a likely place for you to hide."

This might be a correct answer, and it might not; but our friends were compelled to take it, and it was sufficiently plausible as not to be open to a positive doubt."

"But how did you recognise us? Tell us that," interrupted Tom King.

The man hesitated a moment, and then he replied—

"From the printed descriptions which I have seen, you are very accurately described."

"Oh! indeed; that is it."

"Yes, gentlemen, it is, I assure you."

"And you have skulked about the chase, finding out all you could, and I suppose by this means discovered the secret entrance to the cavern?"

"I found the place where you disappeared, and guessed it led to a cavern. I was trying to find out when I trod on those cursed twigs, and then you heard me."

"Just so, and your capture followed. There is one thing, however, you must tell us, and tell us truly, otherwise you swing."

"What is it?"

"To whom have you communicated the important discovery you have made?"

"No one, more's the pity!"

"I don't agree with you there."

The man looked sulen, and said nothing.

What he had stated entirely agreed with what they had suspected, and their situation was very critical.

The chief difficulty in which they now found themselves was whether they were to believe all that the man had told them.

It might be that he had spoken the truth, and it might be that he had lied, but which it was they were quite unable to tell.

"Release me!" exclaimed the man. "I have kept my word, and told you all. Let me go."

"Do you think we are mad?"

"You promised to spare my life."

"I know I did; but I did not say a word about setting you at liberty—you must be mad to think of such a thing."

"Release me!" said the man. "Let me go, and I will promise not to reveal a word."

"It is, perhaps, an unfortunate thing, but we cannot trust you. Wait a moment. You are quite secure as you are, and I will confer with my comrades as to what we are to do with you."

The spy looked uneasy when he heard this, and, for the first time, began to wonder what fate was in reserve for him.

Not heeding this, however, Dick Turpin crossed the sword to the spot upon which his comrades stood, holding the rope.

An anxious conversation now ensued, which the spy watched with such intemperance as a man only could watch who happened to be in his situation.

He could gather little that was satisfactory from the countenances of the highwaymen.

Our friends were now exceedingly puzzled, and for a long time they were unable to decide what would be the best thing they could do with their prisoner.

To take his life, even had they at first felt inclined to do so, they could not, after having promised to spare him as they had.

To release him would be an act of utter madness, for it is not likely that he would hold his peace respecting these events, no matter how many oaths he might take to do so.

To keep him a prisoner seemed no less disagreeable than embarrassing and impossible, so that, whichever way the highwaymen looked at the matter, nothing but difficulty was presented to them.

It was necessary, too, that they should decide quickly,

in order that they might have an opportunity to consult together respecting this fresh danger with which they were menaced.

They seemed to be driven to the resource of keeping him a prisoner, but they had no means of doing this properly, and he was almost certain to escape.

At any rate, there was no place in the cavern where he could be kept in security.

At length, after a great many suggestions had been made, and the matter had been looked at from every possible point of view, Sixteen-String Jack hit upon an expedient.

It was not, perhaps, quite so good a one as might be devised, but, as no better could be proposed, they resolved to adopt it.

The proposition was a simple one.

It was this.

The spy was to be led, pinioned as he was, into the deepest recesses of the wood.

He was then to be bound both hand and foot, and afterwards to be blindfolded and gagged.

In this hopeless and helpless condition he was to be bound to a tree, with the rope which was at that moment about his neck.

This, at first sight, looked a very merciless proceeding, and one little short of murder; but, as Claude suggested, it would do no harm for the man to remain there while they decided as to what proceedings should be taken.

This, then, was ultimately agreed to.

The spy knew in a moment by their dispersing that they had come to a decision, and he wondered what would now happen to him.

So great was his impatience, that he implored to be enlightened on this point.

But our friends were deaf to his entreaties.

"Ask no questions," said Dick. "Come with us; you will know what your fate will be soon enough."

The man, finding that part of their intention was to march him away from the spot where he now was, made up his mind not to stir on any account.

As for our friends, having made up their minds as to what they should do, they, with great speed, set about carrying out their design.

The piece of rope was pulled off the bough, and the prisoner requested to move.

However, true to his determination, he refused to budge an inch.

"Leave me to deal with him," said Dick Turpin, as soon as he discovered what the man's intentions were,

"leave me to deal with him, and you will see he will be all right enough then."

As he spoke, our hero once more drew his sword.

The rope, as we have said, had been pulled down off the bough, but it had not been removed from the prisoner's neck, round which it still clung with unpleasant tightness so far as his own comfort was concerned.

Dick held his sword in his right hand, and with his left he caught hold of the rope about four feet from the noose.

"Now," he said, to the spy, "follow those who walk before you. If you refuse, I shall proceed to harsh measures, and compel you."

The man still persisted in remaining as though his feet were rooted to the ground.

Dick Turpin stood behind him, and, extending his sword, he pricked him with it.

The incision he made was only just in the skin, but the spy felt it, and, uttering a howl of agony, sprang forward several paces involuntarily.

Dick had touched him in about the tenderest part of his person.

"Now," he cried, "go on, without you want it again."

The pain of the one slight wound he had already received seemed, however, to be quite sufficient for the spy.

He walked on after Turpin's three comrades with all imaginable submission.

Presently, however, when he found that he was being conducted into the darkest and gloomiest portion of the chase, he came to a desperate stand.

But Dick was prepared for him.

He still held the sword easily in his grasp, and once more punctured a hole in the spy's skin with it.

Another howl of agony was the result, and he continued on his way again without murmuring.

Into the deepest recesses of the chase the three highwaymen directed their footsteps.

The ground beneath their feet was soft and swampy, and thickly overgrown with rank vegetation such as is ever to be found on such a soil.

At every step they took their feet sank into the morass, but, altogether hopeless of this, they pushed onwards.

Not only, then, did the undergrowth of the forest increase tremendously in its exuberance and rankness, but the trees themselves—the legitimate occupiers of the ground—grew rapidly larger.

The circumferences of their trunks increased until the girth was prodigious, and their branches, shooting out in every direction, crossed and recrossed each other to such an extent, that they almost shut out the light of day.

At length our friends paused, imagining they had reached a spot well suited to their purpose.

The spy looked apprehensively around him, and, as well as he could, into the countenances of his captors—endeavouring to gather from their expression some idea as to his doom.

Nothing was satisfactory or cheering.

Cold drops of perspiration started out upon his trembling body, and he once more glanced around him.

Of all others he thought that spot best calculated for the commission of some awful crime, and he shuddered as the conviction forced itself upon him that he was destined to be the victim.

"Help—help!" he shrieked. "Mercy—mercy! You promised faithfully to spare my life if I would tell you all, and I have done so! Mercy—mercy! Spare my life, and I will do anything you wish!"

"We have no intention of taking your life," said Dick, "without you compel us to do so by continuing to cry out in the manner you did a moment ago. We are going to keep you in safety, that's all."

There was nothing very encouraging in this; but the spy, when thus again assured that no harm was intended him, so far as his life was concerned, gathered hope from it.

Without further delay, our friends now proceeded to carry out their arrangements.

A piece more of the cord was cut off, and with this the spy's ankles were tied together.

His arms were already pinioned; and in this perfectly helpless condition he was placed in an upright position against the trunk of one of the trees.

The rope was then removed from his neck, and with it his body was securely and firmly bound to the tree.

All that now remained was to blindfold and gag him. Despite his remonstrances and entreaties, our friends accomplished their purpose.

They stepped back a pace, and, on looking at their work, came to the conclusion that for a time he was perfectly secure, and what they were eventually to do with him would be a matter for future consideration.

They had first of all their own affairs to settle.

Seeing him all secure, they turned back to the cave, taking precautions to leave such a track as would enable them to proceed direct to the spot upon another occasion.

During their walk back to the cave, the information the spy had given them was thoroughly canvassed.

It was not, however, until the last moment that Dick Turpin recollected that, when they had left the cave with so much precipitation, they had left Mand in it.

What had become of her, he asked himself, during his absence?

Terrified and alarmed she would sure to be; and, under the dominion of those feelings, she would probably rush out of the cave in search of them, and fall into some danger.

With his heart oppressed with forebodings, and over and over reproaching himself for having left the cavern in such a manner, Dick Turpin hastened back, having communicated his fears to his comrades, who shared them in an equal degree with himself.

But they had yet far to go.

The distance from the spot where they had captured the spy to the cave was considerable, and Dick's anxiety now made it seem three times as far as it really was. Regardless of the obstacles which lay before him, he rushed onward, forgetful of everything but the fact that, through his carelessness, Mand would certainly suffer much uneasiness, if not danger.

Leaving him for a few moments, however, we will direct the attention of the reader to a widely different scene which took place some hours before the events we have just described, and the consequences of which proved eminently disastrous to our friends.

It is in this way we shall account for the unexpected presence of the spy, and show how far correct the account was which he gave to Dick Turpin and his three companions.

CHAPTER CCCXC.

GIVES SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAPTAIN OF A DETACHMENT OF DRAGOONS, AND RELATES HOW A SPY WAS SENT TO ENFIELD CHASE TO DISCOVER THE HIGHWAYMEN.

IT was just about dawn on the morning preceeding the one upon which Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack discovered the apparently lifeless form of Claude Duval in the roadway, that the officer in command of a small troop of dragoons, whose duty, in common with many others, was to patrol the roads in search of the four highwaymen, called out "Halt!" to his men.

The word was pronounced in the true military manner, and the little troop at once reined in their steeds.

There was for a moment the faint jingling of accoutrements, and then all was still.

The piece of roadway to which this particular troop had been appointed to patrol was at no very great distance from Enfield Chase, which was, when they turned their eyes in one direction, a very conspicuous object.

It was, in fact, the highroad leading from London to Enfield town. The dragoons wondered for what purpose they had been told to halt, and looked rather curiously towards their captain for an explanation.

The detachment consisted of twelve well-mounted and well-armed men, and the officer who had the command, and who assumed by courtesy the title of captain, made the thirteenth.

It must not be supposed that there was one of these men who at all admired the duty upon which he had been sent.

Indeed, it is questionable whether any feeling could be more universal than this among all the military.

To do what was, as they considered, their own duty, they never grumbled; but they did not like the idea of being made police-officers of, or being got to do that which the regular force had failed to accomplish.

They had no resource, however, but to submit to the commands of their superior officers; the only thing they were left to do was to grumble, and this they did to their hearts' content.

Nevertheless, it did not reconcile them in the least degree to the duty they had to perform.

Perhaps the reader can, in his imagination, realize the difference between spending the night in barracks, with only the customary hours of guard, and between this duty upon which the dragoons were now sent.

For the whole of the live-long night—no matter whether it was wet or fine, cold or warm—they had to mount their horses, and pace up and down a certain piece of road which was appointed them, until the rising sun should warn them that their watch was over.

No doubt the persons who travelled just at that period very much approved of the additional safety with which they performed their journey, but these were the only persons who benefited by the manœuvre.

The authorities made a mistake in sending men to do that work for which they felt the greatest possible amount of dislike, and they could scarcely expect it to be performed efficiently.

They looked only at the rewards which were offered, and certainly anyone would have thought that these were large and tempting enough to induce them to do anything, no matter how repugnant.

The united rewards for the capture and conviction of the four highwaymen amounted to a sum considerably over two thousand pounds, and in addition to this very large amount, a further sum of one hundred pounds had recently been offered to anyone who would give information as to where these daring characters were to be found.

The Secretary of State, who had taken the affair in

hand on behalf on the Government, was much annoyed to think our friends should have so completely disappeared as they had, for nothing had been heard of them for more than a week after the burning of Newgate, although inquiries had been made in every possible direction.

This reward of a hundred pounds, however, to be paid to anyone who should merely disclose or discover where they were lurking, no matter whether they were captured or not, would, he flattered himself, be productive of some very gratifying result.

But he was disappointed and deceived.

Nothing came of this extraordinary offer, which he thought was such a master-stroke of policy; and he was now at his wits' end to know what else he could devise.

Such was the precise aspect of affairs upon the morning to which we now desire to direct the reader's particular attention.

The captain of the little troop, as we have said, called out to his men to halt just about the time when they were thinking that, for the night at least, their lonely task was over.

What the captain was going to say to them they could not for the life of them conceive, but they were not for long left in darkness upon this point.

"My lads," said this officer, "we have done one more night of this disagreeable duty—I call it a disagreeable duty, and so do all of you, I know."

Various murmurs came from the troop, but silence immediately ensued, and the captain continued—

"I don't like this any better than you do; and the sooner we cease to be police-officers the better I shall be pleased. I am tolerably certain, though, that we shall not be called off this duty until these highwaymen are captured. From this, it is clear, our wisest plan will be to catch them, if we can. The reward will be well worth having, and then there will be an end to this work."

"That's all very well, captain," said one of the soldiers; "but where are we to look for these fellows? We should like to set eyes on them well enough, but they appear to have vanished into air."

"They do," replied the captain, "and that is what I wanted to talk to you about."

The men bent forward in their saddles, eager to hear what he had to say.

"There is one thing," began the captain, "which is quite certain, and that is, that these fellows have gone into hiding somewhere, and have made up their minds not to stir from their retreat until this storm has blown over. They have, doubtless, taken their measures very cleverly; and, while the roads continue to be guarded like they are, depend upon it, they will never make their appearance. They will tire our patience out first, I am certain."

"There's no doubt about that, if you like, captain," said the man who had before spoken, and who seemed to be the privileged mouthpiece of his comrades. "I say, captain, there is no doubt about that; for, hang me! if they haven't done that already!"

There was a faint laugh, and something like applause, from the remainder, as he said this.

The captain continued—

"Your patience is exhausted, no doubt; but you must wait a little longer. I have something which I want to propose to you; and, unless I am very much mistaken, it will be the means, not only of our obtaining and dividing among us all the rewards offered, but also free us from this everlasting pacing up and down a dreary road."

This announcement on the part of their captain was received with acclamation, which he was too well pleased to hear to attempt to suppress.

The curiosity of the men, however, who were anxiously impatient to hear what he had to propose, effectually repented its endurance for any length of time.

"I think we can take for granted," he resumed, "that these gentlemen are hiding themselves somewhere. If they were not, we must have heard of them before now. Taking this for granted, I have occupied myself with thinking in this way:—Suppose I was one of these highwaymen, I said to myself, 'where should I look to find a place that would shelter me—some place where I should not be found?' For a long time I could not think where would be best, until all at once the idea occurred to me that I should try to find some out-of-the-way place in the country where few people were ever about, and where my enemies were unlikely to look for me. Well, when

I thought this far, I was able to get farther. I thought of what part of the country we happened to be in, and it seemed just the sort of place that I had made up my mind would be suitable, for there's no houses anywhere near. However, I needn't go through with my thoughts; it will do if I tell you the conclusion I have come to. It is this. Do you see that great wood yonder?"

As he spoke he raised his hand and pointed to Enfield Chase, the topmost trees of which the rising sun had just began to tinge with a beautiful golden hue.

"Yes, yes; we see it," exclaimed the dragoons, "and we know it too; that's Enfield Chase."

"As you say, it is Enfield Chase. Now, I only go by hearsay, but I believe it is a more extensive forest than most people imagine, and, to make a long matter short, it's my opinion, though I have no more grounds for it than I have told you, that Dick Turpin and his three companions are to be found somewhere in it!"

A deep silence followed the utterance of this very remarkable speech, during which the dragoons pondered over the idea which had been suggested to them, and which was what they had never suspected.

The more they reflected, the more likely they thought that either in this or some similar place the four highwaymen were hiding.

They said as much to the captain, who was naturally pleased to find his own notion appeared a probable one to other persons besides himself.

"We agree so far, then," he said, "and now listen to what I have further got to say. As you all know, there's a hundred pounds to be earned by anyone who finds out whereabouts these highwaymen are. Now that's a very handsome sum, to my thinking, and if I was not put here as captain, I should try very hard if I could not earn it."

"How—how?"

"Patience, and I will tell you. I am shut out from this, but you are not. First of all, though, suppose those we want should be in the chase yonder. Well, if we all went in a body to look we should never find them, because it would be impossible to keep our presence a secret. The highwaymen, if they were there, would instantly take to their heels, and we should have all our trouble for nothing."

"But how should we do?"

"I have thought of a plan, and if you will only be patient for a moment I will tell you what it is."

The dragoons pressed forward with increased eagerness.

"Although I cannot be spared from the troop myself, as I am held responsible, there is no reason why one of you should not. Now, one of you had better get a disguise in the first place, and, having done that, creep stealthily into the forest. Whoever goes will then be able to skulk and pry about; and, in the end, if the highwaymen are there, cannot fail to discover them. If this is done it will be a capital thing, because we should be at hand to make them prisoners, and we should get in that way all the rewards; and, if they were not there, why we should have our trouble for nothing, and that would be no great matter. What do you think of that, my comrades?"

The dragoons were one and all enraptured with the brilliant scheme which had been placed—not without a good deal of art—before them.

Everyone was anxious that the affair should be commenced at once, so great was their impatience.

The captain was well pleased to perceive this, and stimulated them to the utmost of his power.

"It now remains to be decided which of you shall disguise himself and go on an exploring expedition into the forest."

"Send me, captain; send me, captain!" was the cry that came from every lip; for they were all equally desirous of availing themselves of this chance of earning the hundred pounds which would of course belong exclusively to the man who made the discovery.

"I cannot send you all," said the captain; "I would much rather that one volunteered to go upon this duty. Who will volunteer?"

All pressed forward in a moment.

"I see you all want to go; but that is impossible. You must adopt some mode of making a choice."

"How? captain—how?"

"You had better draw lots; that will be the fairest way."

Against this nothing could be said, and the proposition was at once agreed to and adopted.

They did this in a peculiar manner among themselves by tossing up a halfpenny, and guessing whether it was head or tail.

The result of this was, that the enviable duty fell a good one of their comrades.

Of all the rest, this was least liked; and the captain, when he felt, who fate had appointed to carry out his scheme, he felt much vexed, and could not help wishing it was someone else.

To alter this, without producing disaffection, he well knew was impossible, so he very wisely forbore to make the least attempt.

The man stepped forward from the rest, and prepared to receive his instructions from the captain.

These were said, and were comprehended in what he had already said.

He was to disguise himself, steal into the wood, skulk about until he made a discovery, and, when he had learned all that he was able, he was to return and communicate the intelligence to the captain.

In addition to this, a bugle was given him, and should anything extraordinary happen, or should he fall into any danger, he was to blow a long note upon it—the captain assuring him that he would take care to keep with his troop within reach of the sound.

Matters being thus adjusted, they retired to their quarters, where they passed the day; and the fortunate soldier, as he was considered, having had a long and refreshing sleep, disguised himself and set out for his destination.

He was sure he reached the chase unobserved, and skulked about for a long time without being able to find out anything.

This man, as the reader must be aware, was the very spy that our friends so fortunately captured.

It so happened that he entered the chase at a point far distant from that position of it which was frequented by our friends.

Consequently the spy, although in the forest during the time the extraordinary marriage ceremony was performed between Dick Turpin and Maud, saw nothing of it.

He was a persevering man though, was this soldier, and he did not allow this want of immediate success to daunt him, and he determined not to lose all hope until he had thoroughly searched the chase in every part.

From its vast extent this would be a work of time.

Steadily pursuing his object, he worked his way round to that side of the chase opposite to the one by which he had entered it.

When he arrived here it was close upon daybreak.

Having reached the confines of the chase, he, with a feeling of disappointment and vexation which he could not repress, prepared to turn back again.

It was just as he was about to do this that he started by a faint sound.

He paused instantly, and listened.

The sound came again, and with increased distinctness.

Anticipating, and yet scarcely daring to hope for a discovery, the spy crouched down until the dense undergrowth of the chase completely concealed his form.

The sound he had heard soon attained a decisive character.

It was the sound of footsteps.

Some persons were approaching.

Eagerly he strained his eyes, and gazed in the direction from which the sounds came.

Presently he could distinguish voices mingling with the footsteps.

The darkness baffled him, and he could see nothing but those objects which were very near him.

He was consoled by the knowledge that the sounds came nearer, and that the murmuring of voices became plainer.

At length the dim and shadowy figures appeared in sight, and continued to advance.

Fearful that if they continued they would discover his whereabouts, the spy, as silently as he was able, slunk through the bushes.

In his progress, however, he could not avoid making a slight rustling sound.

It was this that reached the ears of Maud: for, of

course, it was no other than Dick Turpin and herself who the spy both saw and heard approaching.

A faint, gray light now began to steal through the trees.

It was dark in the chase long after it was light in the plains, and when the sun rose there was never more than a dim, hazy twilight.

This was the light that now began to bring different objects into view.

The spy was aware in a moment that his movements had excited suspicion, but he had the presence of mind to remain profoundly still.

The alarm then ceased.

By a slight change in his position, which he effected noiselessly, he could hear some of the conversation which passed between Maud and Dick, and it was not long before the spy was able, by attending to what they said, to come to the conclusion that Dick Turpin stood before him.

This was, indeed, important information, and, as day was fast coming on, he thought he had better creep away from where he was, and communicate the result of his errand to his officer.

With great caution he stole away, so far as he could tell, without giving a second alarm.

Once at a distance he rose to his feet, and made his way at full speed to the place where his comrades had taken up their quarters.

Upon arriving he at once had an interview with Lia captain, who was delighted with the information given him, though he could not help thinking it was too good to be true.

As the spy had obtained no information respecting the other three highwaymen, the captain dispatched him again the same night, with instructions to be particularly careful, and to find out all he could, so that, when the dragons made an attack upon the highwaymen, they could make sure of the victory.

Again, then, this man set off on his perilous errand.

We have seen how it eventuated.

He went direct to the spot where he had seen Dick and Maud, and, somewhat to his surprise, found them still upon the same spot.

On this occasion he was enabled to approach them very closely without being perceived, and he also overheard sufficient of their conversation to let him know that they were waiting for the return of their comrades, who had gone off upon some expedition or other.

It was only now and then, however, that he could distinguish what was said, and he tried to creep still closer.

The quick ear of Maud Gouldman again detected him, and this time he had much difficulty in escaping the rigid search which Dick made after him.

However, he did escape, and shortly afterwards he saw three horsemen arrive upon the scene.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

THE SPY BREAKS LOOSE FROM HIS BONDS, AND COMMUNICATES IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO HIS CAPTAIN.

THE three horsemen who now arrived were no other than Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack.

As we have related in a precedent chapter, they had just returned from their long and perilous excursion.

Under the excitement of this meeting the alarm they had so recently experienced was forgotten.

They all repaired to the cavern, and the spy took good care to keep upon their track, though at a very safe distance.

The exultation which now filled his heart knew no bounds.

His task was not over yet, however.

He had to track the highwaymen to their secret haunt.

Like an Indian he kept upon their trail, halting when they halted, and all the time accommodating his own speed to theirs.

In this manner he followed them into the cavern.

But he did not see them enter.

Prudence compelled him to keep in the rear, and it thus happened that it was not until some time after they entered the cavern that he became aware that they had disappeared.

Where they had vanished he knew not, but, being

able to form some idea as to the spot where the disappearance had taken place, he wisely resolved to conceal himself in the vicinity and keep watch.

His patience was not put to a very severe trial, for, as the reader will remember, almost as soon as the fire was lighted, Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Sixteen-String Jack set out upon their hunting expedition.

The spy did not see them emerge from the secret passage, but he caught sight of their almost immediately after they had done so.

Seeing the rocks before him, it was very natural that he should come to the conclusion that there was a hiding-place somewhere among them.

He argued, too, that the three highwaymen, who he could never forcing their way through the trees, would presently return.

Under this impression, he took up such a position as enabled him to command a view of the whole face of the rock in which the opening of the secret passage was situated.

Here he waited patiently, and, ere long, he had cause to congratulate himself upon having acted in the way he had done.

He saw our three friends again make their appearance, and he saw that one of them carried a fawn slung over his shoulder.

Never did the soldier look so earnestly at all that now took place.

He saw the bush pulled down in the manner we have so frequently described—he saw the highwaymen enter the passage, and the bush pulled back into its former position, thus effectually concealing the opening through which they had passed.

For a moment or two after they had disappeared the spy remained profoundly still, moving neither hand nor foot, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the particular bush as though he feared that, if he once removed them, he should never be able to pitch upon it again.

Having waited what he considered a safe period, he cautiously stole towards it.

But in his progress he never gave one glance at where he was going, but steadfastly fixed his gaze upon the bush, and continued to do so until he had reached it.

Then he drew a long breath, and listened.

But all was still as the grave itself.

He drew yet closer.

He placed his ear against the prickly bush, and listened again.

But he could hear nothing.

The passage leading to the cavern was of too great a length for any sounds made by our friends to be audible where he stood.

What to do now the spy scarcely knew.

His curiosity was very strongly excited.

He wished to communicate his intelligence to the captain, and he wished to obtain even more information than was at present in his possession.

After a brief period of hesitation he resolved, as all continued so still, to pull down this bush as he had seen the highwaymen do, and find out what kind of place it was beyond.

Accordingly, he did so; and the result of this action we already know.

Seeing a long, dark passage, he made one step into it, and trod upon some of the dry twigs which Tom King had so cunningly placed there.

The crackling sound came with startling loudness in the silence of that rudely-vaulted passage; and, when he heard it, his heart seemed almost to turn to ice.

So overcomes was he, that he could not move, but leant against the rocky wall.

The sound of Tom's voice, however, and the hasty trampling of feet, warned him of the danger of remaining, and, making a violent effort, he started off, and concealed himself among the nearest bushes.

Terrified by the rapid approach, he started off, and was hotly pursued by them.

With all that afterwar, look place, up to the moment he was bound to the tree and left there, this reader is acquainted; and, now that these additional circumstances have been related, it will be seen that the confession he made to Dick Turpin was in most respects correct, though he concealed quite as much as he disclosed.

It will be now easy to understand why he was so bitterly

disappointed when the bugle was dashed from his lips at the very moment he was going to blow a blast upon it, which would have brought his companions to his immediate assistance.

When he failed in this, a remarkable change in his behaviour took place, and much of the hardihood and courage which up to this period he had displayed evaporated.

When he was tied to the tree in the manner we have described, he listened with the greatest anxiety to the retreating footsteps of our friends.

He could not call out to them and implore them to return.

He was gagged, and, but for this circumstance, he would have made the wood resound with his outcries.

At last the footsteps of the highwaymen became inaudible, and then terrible thoughts took possession of his mind.

Of what he endured no description could convey an adequate idea.

After a time, however, he turned his attention to freeing himself from the bonds by which he was held.

But this appeared a really hopeless task.

The highwaymen had taken particular care that he should be quite secure, and although he struggled desperately to free himself from the ropes, the only result he achieved was to become more than ever convinced of their strength and security.

Never until that moment did he fully realize what useful things his hands were.

He would have given anything to have one of them at liberty.

He struggled hard at the cord, but to no purpose.

By continuing his efforts, however, and by the total sacrifice of the skin round his wrists and on the back of his hands, he fancied he slackened the tightness of the rope in some degree.

This encouraged him to continue, and, after suffering incredible agony, he released one of his hands.

When he had done this, the rest was comparatively easy.

But he had a strong stimulant to urge him on to make the most desperate exertions.

Smarting with pain, and with his hands dripping with blood, he removed first of all the bandage which covered his eyes, then the gag which prevented his speech, and, finally, the cords by which his ankles were tied together, and by which his body was secured to the trunk of the tree.

He was then free.

His first act was to utter some horrible maledictions upon the heads of those who had served him in this manner, and if the troop had been anywhere near at hand, there was no doubt that, under the influence of passion as he was, he would have placed the bugle to his lips, and availed himself of the quickest and readiest means of summoning his comrades.

As this was out of the question, he burst forth with a few more curses, and dashed off in the direction which would take him to them.

He had a long way to go, and the rapid exertion soon exhausted him.

He kept on, however, and at length reached his destination.

The captain, perceiving him return, questioned him eagerly.

The spy, had a long tale to tell, but the captain was rejoiced at the tidings he received, and from that moment looked upon the large reward as already earned.

He determined, however, not to do as the spy wanted him, which was to set off at once, but to wait until night fairly came, and approach the enemy under the cover of the darkness.

This was unquestionably the best course to be adopted, and the soldier was compelled, though much against his inclination, to bow before the order of his commanding officer.

The time to nightfall would be but short, for already the sun was rapidly declining behind the clouds on the western horizon.

The captain, in the meantime, employed himself in questioning and cross-questioning the man, and he did this with so much address and skill, that he made himself familiar with every incident, however trivial.

When he was sure that he knew all, he considered

his plans for a little while, and gave particular instructions to every member of his troop.

By the time this was done it was almost dark, and it was quite so when they were all mounted and in readiness to start.

Upon arriving at the chase the whole party dismounted, and tethered their horses in such a manner that they were perfectly secure, and, at the same time, able to crop the short, sweet grass which grew plentifully around them.

This done, the spy at once took upon himself the task of leading his companions, and never was a service more willingly performed.

They advanced with the greatest possible caution.

The spy had noted the position of the cavern well, for he made his way towards it without deviating from his course in the least.

Upon reaching the entrance they came to a halt.

It was, however, a brief one, for the captain had already made up his mind what to do.

With his own hand he seized the thorn-bush, and, pulling it down, disclosed the commencement of the passage.

He was pleased to see this, because it was important confirmatory evidence of what the soldier had told him.

At a sign, two of the men seized the thorn-bush, and pulled it up by the roots, thus leaving the opening clear.

"Now, my lads!" he cried, in a low but emphatic voice, "follow me, and the reward will be ours!"

The soldiers made no response, but followed closely in the footsteps of their captain, who rushed into the passage.

Truly were our friends now menaced with a danger of no common or ordinary description.

The secret upon which they so much relied was discovered, and foes who, from their skill in the use of their weapons they had everything to dread, were close upon them.

In order to understand what follows, it will, however, be necessary for us to leave the dragons in the passage for a little while, during which we will revert to the proceedings of Dick Turpin and his friends.

Anxious in the extreme to ascertain whether any harm had befallen Maud, who he had left so hastily and so thoughtlessly, our hero made his way back to the cavern with all the speed which he was capable of making.

His heart was filled with dread that she had either encountered some terrible danger by remaining in the cavern alone, or else that she had incurred extreme peril by venturing to leave it.

Over and over again did he reproach himself for what he had done, but it was now too late. From what the spy had said, and from his behaviour, Dick feared that he had some companions in the chase, and who he relied upon coming to his assistance.

He could account in no other manner for the singular boldness he had displayed.

At length Dick came in sight of the entrance to the cavern.

It was still open, with the thorn-bush lying down upon the ground just as they had left it.

To his joy, however, he saw Maud standing just within the passage.

She was safe and unhurt.

As soon as she found who was approaching, she bounded forward, and our hero felt full of joy to think the apprehension under which he had laboured was groundless.

One glance into all their countenances was quite sufficient to let Maud know that something, both disagreeable and important, had taken place: and she was impatiently anxious to know what had taken place, as well as to have an explanation respecting the alarm which had caused them to rush out into the chase with so much precipitation.

Dick asked her to be patient, and led her into the cavern, where he was followed by his companions.

Tom King remained behind to place her back to the proper position.

This done, he rejoined his comrades, who by this time had reached the cavern.

A very anxious consultation as to what had best to be done now took place between them, in the course of which Maud was made aware of the precise nature of the danger with which they were threatened.

Her terror was excessive, and Dick found his efforts to calm her agitation were scarcely sufficient.

The position of our friends was now exceedingly embarrassing.

Doubtless a great deal of what the spy had told them was correct, but in other points he might have deceived them, or suppressed something.

There was danger every way.

If they remained in the chase they were almost certain to be attacked, and the result of such an encounter would be very doubtful; and if they ventured to leave their place of concealment, such a watch would doubtless be kept all around that they would be pounced upon and captured merely through the numbers of their assailants being so superior to their own.

Claude Duval was of opinion that the secret of the whereabouts had been discovered, but that their foes, not altogether liking the idea of attacking them in their stronghold, had adopted the expedient of sending this spy in order to frighten them out of the chase, when they would immediately attack them with every advantage.

This was a view of the case which might or might not be a correct one.

At any rate there was a doubt upon the matter.

Knowing the cunning of their foes, it was not unlikely that they should adopt some such mode as that described by Claude Duval.

The more they considered this subject the greater dilemma did they find themselves to be in.

Claude Duval, however, strenuously opposed their leaving their present quarters.

There was no other place to which they could take themselves where they would be more safe.

They were not quite certain, either, whether they would be attacked.

In the end, however, they unanimously came to the conclusion that to attempt, just at present, to leave the chase would be dangerous in the extreme, and that the best thing they could do was to remain patiently where they were, and await the result of what had happened.

They fancied that should they be attacked by their foes they should be able to stand a siege of some length, and, in anticipation of this event, they set about putting it into as good a state of defence as they could.

Materials were collected and placed together in a heap, by means of which they could barricade and block up the entrance of the cavern, and, in short, nothing was left undone that was at all likely to add to their security.

Maud watched all these proceedings with great apprehensiveness.

She could not help thinking they were in most imminent danger, and that it was next to impossible that they should be able to escape.

The coolness with which the four highwaymen looked upon it inspired her with some slight degree of courage and confidence.

Sixteen-String Jack made a proposition which he at once proceeded to carry out.

It was to make his way to the outside, so as to give warning of the approach of any one.

This was a very sensible undertaking, and his comrades highly approved of it.

They agreed to take this duty upon themselves by turns.

They were uneasy chiefly upon one point.

They were very short of ammunition, and they had no means of obtaining a fresh supply.

This would prove a second drawback to them, should they be attacked.

Such, then, was the aspect which things presented in the old cavern after the discovery of the spy.

Sixteen-String Jack was watching and waiting, close to the thorn-bush which concealed his opening in the rocks, and his companions inside adopting every means which they thought would conduce to their common safety.

There were several fragments of rock lying about in various places on the floor of the cavern, and these they all piled up close to the opening of the passage, so as to block it up with them, should circumstances occur to render such an expedient necessary.

In short, nothing that they could think of was left undone.

And now night came on.

The highwayman had said that, if that night passed



[DICK TURPIN STEALS UNAWARES UPON HIS FOES.]

over without any attack being made upon them, they should have better hopes of remaining unmolested.

Presently, as the darkness deepened, the vigilance of our old friend Sixteen-String Jack increased.

He paced up and down in front of the cavern like a sentinel, making use of all his faculties to detect any sign of an enemy's approach.

At length, in one particular direction, he fancied he heard a crackling, rustling sound.

He paused and listened.

He was not mistaken.

Pressing onward, but with great caution, he saw the troop of dragoons advancing in the manner we have already described.

This was enough for Jack, and, without waiting to hear any more, he hurried back to the cavern.

CHAPTER CCCXCII.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS FRIENDS ARE ATTACKED IN THE CAVERN BY THE DETACHMENT OF DRAGOONS.

BREATHLESS—not only with the speed he had made, but with the discovery of the dragoons—Sixteen-String Jack entered the passage, and replaced the thorn-bush as quickly as he was able.

Upon reaching the cavern, he found that his three friends were all standing up with anxiety imprinted upon their countenances.

They had heard his hasty approach, and had started up, impatient for the intelligence of which they questioned no one was the bearer.

The interior of the cavern would have been quite dark but for the wood fire smouldering on the hearthstone, and, as this was for the most part composed of dry wood, it diffused a cheerful light around it, and brought out into salient relief the rugged outlines of the cavern.

By the aid of this firelight the three highwaymen were

she perceived the expression on the countenance of their friend, and, before he had time to speak, they judged that something momentous had taken place.

He hastened to let them know the worst.

"Quick—quick!" he cried. "There is not a moment to be lost! Our foes are upon us! Some ten or twelve men—soldiers—for I saw the glitter of their accoutrements, are making their way through the chase in the direction of this place, and, doubtless, with the intention of attacking us. Block up the entrance as we determined to do, we shall then have a barricade behind which we can fight!"

Almost before he had finished speaking Sixteen-String Jack seized several of the fragments of rock, and began to hack earnest the laborious task of blocking up the passage with them.

In this he was instantly seconded by his comrades, who could tell by his manner that there was every need for them to be urgent.

As the piece of rock had been placed there for this purpose, they were able to perform their work quickly, and they soon had the opening completely blocked up.

They were only just in time.

Ere the last block could be wedged into its place the dragoons had entered the cavern, and with great impetuosity rushed forward.

Their onward progress was checked by the mass of rock.

They were compelled to halt.

This was an obstacle which the captain scarcely expected to find.

It told him at a glance that preparation had been made for their reception, and that they would have to fight the matter out.

Calling out in an encouraging manner to his men, and telling them that their prey was almost within their grasp, he commanded them to storm the barricade.

This was a work to which the soldiers were accustomed, and they responded to his command with hearty good will.

But though the hastily-constructed mass of stones trembled before the attack which was made upon it, yet it did not give way.

Our friends had taken care that each piece should be wedged in firmly.

Repulsed on this first occasion, the soldiers immediately prepared for a second and more vigorous charge.

They made use of the butt-ends of their muskets for this purpose, and the concussion was so tremendous that several of the fragments were dislodged from their position, and rolled on to the floor of the cavern.

They were now able to see before them, though not much, for the highwaymen had scattered the fire about, and attempted to extinguish it.

The only illumination there was, was a dull red glare, which proceeded from the fast-expiring embers.

By the aid of this they could, nevertheless, see into the interior of the cavern.

Another rush removed some more of the fragments, and the consternation of our friends can be imagined when they saw their barricade thus rapidly demolished.

The captain of dragoons, having made this demonstration, conceived it to be his duty to call upon the highwaymen to surrender.

He did this in a very loud tone of voice, but no notice whatever was taken of his words.

He could neither hear nor see anyone in the cavern, and but for the fact that the last stone of the barricade had been added when he was within a short distance of it, he would have fancied the place to be untenanted.

Finding his first summons to surrender disregarded, he hazarded another, and this time coupled with the threat that if they did not immediately surrender, he should command his men to fire, and the consequences of their resistance would rest upon their own heads.

No more notice was taken of this than there was of his former appeal.

He waited a moment or two, however, when finding all remained still, he commanded his men to storm the barricade and enter the cavern.

Dick Turpin and his comrades now felt that they could no longer hold back from action.

At this crisis something must be done.

Nearly half the barricade had been removed, and the

lower portion would probably be stormed with greater ease than the upper.

There was only one thing that would prevent this, and that was that the bottom block was of enormous size.

Nevertheless, our friends determined to strike a blow at their foes.

Suddenly, advancing into the middle of the cavern, they levelled the loaded pistols they held in their hands, and fired a volley.

Maud, who had been left by Dick in a place of safety, sprang forward, terrified for Dick's safety.

She clung to him, and he instinctively clasped her round the waist.

"Back—back!" he cried. "Back for your lives!"

He set the example of doing this while he spoke.

It would have been madness for them to have remained where they were, and to have exposed themselves to the fire of their enemies.

The detachment of dragoons was very densely packed in the little passage, which was only just wide enough for two men to stand abreast in, and the four bullets which came from the pistols of the highwaymen told upon them with terrible effect.

Enraged by this unexpected return for his temperate speech, the captain commanded his men to fire.

"Make ready!" he cried, in the stern, abrupt tones of military command. "Present!—fire!"

The command was obeyed instantly.

Almost before the last word had left his lips, a rattling discharge from the muskets of the dragoons raised a thousand echoes in that subterraneous place.

The bullets, one and all, harmlessly expended themselves against the wall of the cavern.

Indeed, it would seem as though the captain's object in causing this volley to be fired was more with the idea that it would cause a feeling of intimidation in the breasts of the highwaymen than aught else.

Certain is it, they were nowhere to be seen when the men fired.

If this was his object, it failed most lamentably; for our friends were the last people in the world to be dismayed into a surrender by the firing of a few musket-shots.

The captain was soon convinced of this, for the highwaymen, as soon as they found their foes had fired, stepped forward to the opening in the rock, and poured forth another volley, precipitately retreating as soon as their fingers had pressed the triggers.

This made the captain almost frantic.

Such a disastrous reception as this he had never counted upon.

In fact, his calculation was, that the highwaymen would be overawed by his very appearance.

The repulse he met with, however, only served to make him still determined to effect his object.

He had now an additional motive, and this was a more powerful one than that which had first prompted him to undertake the expedition.

This was revenge.

He looked upon the death or capture of the four highwaymen with quite a personal feeling, and he determined within himself that, no matter at what risk, one of these should be accomplished.

He had himself received a slight wound in his left arm, and the pain which this occasioned tended not a little to enrage him.

Sword in hand, he rushed furiously upon the mass of rock, and set the example of scrambling over it.

This was what all his men had hesitated to do, because of the manifest danger they incurred by thus exposing their persons to the enemy.

But the captain was now wound up to such a pitch that he became utterly heedless of this.

After a desperate effort, he succeeded in scrambling on to the top of the barricade, and from thence he rapidly descended to the floor of the cavern.

To his surprise, he found that no attack whatever was made upon him, either while he was on the rock-work or when he reached the floor.

Inspired by his example, and encouraged by perceiving that their captain met with no mishap in consequence of this exploit, those dragoons who were unhurt, or only slightly wounded, also scrambled over the barrier into the cavern.

Almost as soon as his feet touched the ground, the captain found several of his men close behind him.

The interior of the cavern was now, however, in utter darkness, and they were unable to distinguish anything.

The fire had become quite extinct.

The highwaymen had scattered the embers which composed it in every direction, and, after having smouldered for a short time, they one after another expired.

At the present moment there was not one which emitted even the feeblest gleam of light.

All was silent too.

Their foes, who, from what had taken place, they imagined would greet them warmly, made no movement.

The captain turned round on his heels once.

Nothing, however, met his straining eyes but uniform, utter darkness.

The silence, too, continued.

Where were the highwaymen, from whom they had already suffered so severely?

That was a mystery.

They made no demonstration of their presence whatever.

The captain began to grow terribly apprehensive.

He dreaded he knew not what.

The prominent idea in his mind was that he was about to be stricken down by some hideous, unexpected, and invisible danger.

A thousand times more preferable would it have been to his feelings had the highwaymen continued to attack them as they had done at first.

"Lights! lights!" he cried, in a voice rendered so unlike his own by apprehension and anxiety, that his men scarcely recognised it. "Lights, I say! Let us have lights!"

When he had thus imperiously uttered this command, he felt calmer.

He knew that in a moment or so he would be obeyed, for his men were all provided with materials for obtaining a light readily.

It was while in this suspenseful state, however, that there came to his ears a hollow, rumbling sound.

All his men heard it, for the noise was considerable, but what it proceeded from they were unable to form any idea.

It was like nothing which they had heard in the whole course of their lives.

They could only compare it to the muttering of thunder, or the roaring sound which is heard from a cannon when discharged from a great distance.

This added not a little to the uneasiness of the captain's mind.

He connected the sound, naturally enough, with the highwaymen; but then, he asked himself, what could they be about?

The horrible thought that they were about to take some step which would involve himself and his men in utter destruction, took possession of his mind, and the thought was of such a nature as almost to drive him mad.

Fortunately, at this moment the soldiers succeeded in igniting the torches which they had brought with them.

They held them high in the air, so as to diffuse their light as much as possible.

At first they were quite inadequate to disperse the darkness, which seemed to hang about the cavern in large clouds.

Gradually, however, their brightness increased.

With his eyeballs almost starting from their sockets, the captain of the dragoons glared all about him.

But his gaze rested not upon the forms of his foes, nor did they, even now, make the least demonstration of their presence.

This was most bewildering.

Snatching a torch from the hands of the soldier who stood nearest to him, the captain waved his sword round his head, and advanced still nearer to the centre of the cavern.

But he saw no one.

Heard no one.

Again he raised his voice, and called upon the highwaymen, in the king's name, to surrender, and again pronounced that, if they would submit quietly, and without resistance, their lives should be spared, and their persons be uninjured.

But he might as well have addressed his words to the rocky walls of the cavern for all the notice that was taken of them.

By this time the torches had all fairly caught light, and by their aid he was able to see around him.

But his eyes rested not on the forms he wished to see, and the thought obtruded itself, and refused to be banished, that he should even now be balked of capturing them, although a little while ago he seemed to stand so good a chance of doing so.

With his heart relieved from a great many of the vague apprehensions that had pressed upon it, the captain commenced a rigid exploration of the cavern.

Its area was large, but it was not long before he had been all over it.

He had encountered no one, nor had he been able to perceive the least trace of those he so much wished to find.

His doubts now began to multiply, indeed, although he would not have confessed it, he almost feared that his chances of effecting their capture were small indeed.

In the cavern they certainly were not.

He was quite convinced of that, because he had been over the whole area of it himself.

He had noticed, however, that there were numerous recesses in the rock, and these he determined should be thoroughly explored, one by one, so that if they had concealed themselves they should not escape detection.

With this end in view, he first of all caused a man to seat himself upon the partially-demolished barricade, who was to see that no one attempted to leave the cavern by that means, while he, with the rest, who were in a condition to do so, entered the recesses in succession, and explored them in every part.

We have previously alluded to and described these places.

They were simply indentations in the rock, and had no outlet.

Of this the soldiers quickly satisfied themselves.

One after another they entered these places, but without achieving any result whatever.

The highwaymen were not in any of them, nor was there a trace of their recent presence.

There were more recesses, however, to examine, and they buoyed themselves up with the hope of making the wished-for discovery in one of these.

As they proceeded, however, and increased the number of recesses they had discovered, their hopes grew less and less.

At length they came close to the one they had first entered.

Close to this was one more cavity, and this was the only one left to examine.

If they did not find the highwaymen here, their disappearance would remain an inscrutable mystery.

Hoping, and yet scarcely daring to hope, when they thought of the many disappointments they had already experienced, that they were on the right track at last, and that the highwaymen would either be discovered or the mystery of their disappearance elucidated, the captain and his soldiers thronged into this recess, the entrance of which was much narrower than any of the rest.

CHAPTER CCCXCIII.

THE DRAGOONS FAIL TO DISCOVER THE HIGHWAYMEN, BUT THE MYSTERY OF THEIR DISAPPEARANCE IS REVEALED TO THE READER.

SUCH being the case, it immediately became blocked up, and the dragoons in their efforts to enter it quickly, did nothing but impede their own progress.

The captain was first, however, and he knocked his torch against a projection of the rock so as to remove the charred portion, and caused it to burn more brightly.

He then glanced about him.

In its general appearance this recess differed but slightly from those he had previously examined, except that it grew rapidly wider and higher.

Pressing forward, and not paying so much attention to where he trod as he ought to have done, he called out to his troopers to follow him, and they obeyed with great alacrity, the moment the difficulty of passing through the narrow entrance was overcome.

Suddenly the captain, after proceeding about twenty

paces, came to a halt, and, at the same time, uttered an exclamation of surprise and astonishment.

He discovered that he could go no further.

Before him was a mass of earth which completely blocked up the passage.

From the peculiar smell which this earth gave forth the captain could tell that it had been recently disturbed.

There was some deep mystery here, he felt convinced, and he waved his torch anxiously round and round his head, in the endeavour to discover something more.

In this, however, he was unsuccessful.

His men now all crowded eagerly around him.

They, too, held their torches aloft, and, though there was now a great accession of light, yet it did not seem to show them any more than they at first perceived.

The fresh smell of this earth, coupled with the manner in which the passage was blocked up with it, made the captain fancy that a portion of the roof of this passage had recently fallen in.

He then remembered the peculiar roaring sound which he had heard while in the outer cavern, and for which he had not been able to account.

The noise now, he all at once recollected, was such as would be occasioned by the fall of a large mass of either rock or earth.

By what he saw before him, he was driven to the conclusion that this had taken place, and, on conferring with his men, he found they were of the same opinion as himself.

This seemed to afford a clue to the disappearance of the highwaymen which had so much perplexed him.

They might have sought shelter in this place, and either intentionally caused the roof to fall, or else they had been buried beneath it.

Which of these two it was he had no idea, and both were merely suppositions, so that it was possible for him to be mistaken.

The passage being obviously filled up with a mass of earth which had fallen from the roof was a suspicious circumstance, but nothing more.

For some time both he and his men remained gazing blankly at the obstruction in their path, but awakening at last to the inutilty of this, he turned round, though still undecided as to what he had better do.

He almost repented now that he had embarked in this enterprise at all.

He had gained nothing by it but disappointment, and had lost two or three of his men.

The prospect, too, of his being able to gain anything seemed slight, and his breast was filled with a feeling of deep vexation.

At length he determined to make his way into the outer cavern, and there hold a council of war with his men.

He felt it a relief to have decided upon something, and he ordered his men to leave the passage.

He was never more willingly obeyed than in the present instance; for the soldiers, having come to the conclusion that the roof had fallen in, exchanged anxious glances with each other; for they did not know how soon the portion beneath which they stood would also fall and crush them.

This was by no means a pleasant thought; and as soon as they were commanded to do so, they cleared out with uncommon expedition.

The captain never once dreamt of this danger, and he wondered at the extraordinary alacrity which his men displayed.

He followed them, and, on emerging into the cavern, his ear was saluted with a succession of groans.

These came from the lips of his wounded soldiers.

The two volleys which our friends had fired had done terrible execution, for it was like shooting down a tube thronged with men.

Several of the dragoons had been severely hit, and it was feared that the hurts of one or two would prove fatal.

The captain had forgotten this, and now that he was reminded of it, he felt greatly exasperated as this result was so different to what he expected.

The wounded dragoons, hearing and seeing their companions approaching, cried out for assistance, and implored for a light to be left with them.

While in the passage, the captain had had all the men who carried torches along with him, so that the cavern

was plunged in utter darkness, of which the wounded men bitterly complained.

Their leader felt that he was imperatively called upon to see that their injuries were attended to.

Now that the fire no longer burnt upon the hearth, a chill atmosphere filled the cavern, and the captain shuddered as he felt its influence.

The night was one of intense frost, and the biting air found its way through the numberless crevices in the roof.

At this moment the captain struck his foot against something, and, looking down to find what it was, discovered it to be a partially-burnt piece of wood.

It was a log that had been knocked off by the highwaymen when they had dispersed the fire and scattered the materials of which it was composed about the floor of the cavern.

"Make a fire," cried the captain, as soon as he saw what it was that lay at his feet. "There seems to be plenty of material, and you have your torches to light it with. Make haste, and then we will consult together as to what had best be done."

The stone slab, which was fixed in the floor for the purpose of a fire, was quickly discovered by the men, as they roamed about picking up the fuel, and as there were several of them engaged in the work, there was soon a goodly heap piled up upon it.

With the torches they ignited it.

The half-burnt wood, some of which was still quite warm, lighted readily, and in less time than one would have thought possible, a large cheerful fire was burning, which not only dispensed that warmth of which they so much felt the need, but illuminated the cavern with much greater power than the torches had done.

The wounded dragoons were now placed at a convenient distance from the fire, and their comrades attended to their hurts as well as they were able.

Two, however, were judged to be in such a precarious state that the captain judged it his duty to despatch one of his men to fetch a surgeon, for it would never have done to have moved them.

There was water in abundance in the cavern, and with this their wounds were washed, and their parching thirst assuaged.

Nothing more could be done for them now until the surgeon arrived, and the brave fellows, aware of this, did not utter another murmur, but waited patiently until he came.

In the meantime, the fire having been replenished, the captain called his men around him to hold his intended conference.

Happening to see a cask, he rolled it up to the fire, and sat down upon it.

It was the identical cask upon which the Rev. Mr. Martext had stood when he performed the remarkable marriage ceremony between Maud Gouldman and Dick.

A rather animated consultation now ensued as to the course it would be most prudent for them to adopt.

Many suggestions were made, and many hypotheses started to account for the disappearance of the highwaymen.

The prevalent notion appeared to be, not that they had been buried by the fall of the roof, or that they had escaped, but that they were hiding somewhere close at hand, and waiting for them to take their departure.

Many arguments were brought forward in support of this view; and, in the end, it was determined that they should all remain where they were with their ears open—until the surgeon arrived, at least—by which time they thought something would happen to show whether they were correct or not.

Having brought themselves into this frame of mind, we will leave them seated by the fire, listening eagerly for any slight sound which might happen to strike upon their ears, while we proceed to give the real and true explanation of the mysterious disappearance of our friends.

We should have done so earlier, but that it was deemed best to relate the whole of the proceedings of the soldiers to this point, so that, when we once commenced, we should not have to break off the thread of the narrative.

We resume, then, at that period when our friends, rapidly advancing, fired their second volley, after having done which they rapidly retreated.

They were just in time to avoid the bullets from the

muskets of the dragoons, which flattened themselves against the opposite wall of the cavern.

It may be imagined that our friends suffered no small amount of apprehension when they saw the very energetic manner in which they were attacked, and when they perceived how little their ardour was damped by the execution they felt certain they had already done among them.

"It is all over with us," whispered Dick, who took in at one comprehensive glance all their chances and all their dangers. "It is all over with us, without we can contrive to leave the cavern in some way. In another moment they will be upon us, and if it comes to a hand-and-hand encounter on level ground I fear we shall get the worst off, for their numbers seem to exceed ours by far, and you may depend they are well skilled in the use of the weapons they carry."

"You have hit the right nail on the head, Dick," said Tom King: "but how we are to leave the cavern I cannot imagine. We have once explored it, and were only able to find one outlet."

"True! and yet, ever since that affair of the serpent I have fancied that we must have been in error."

"We can but make the attempt to leave the cavern," said Claude Duval; "if we fail in doing so, we cannot make our situation worse than it is at present."

"That is, if we are expeditious."

"Certainly."

"Come, then; there is an opening in the rocks just behind us. Let us enter there."

They did so.

Dick Turpin, with his arm round the waist of Maud, followed Tom King, who was the first to enter the recess.

The rear was brought up by those inseparable companions, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack.

They were only just in time in entering the recess, for at this moment the captain of the dragoons was climbing over the barricade.

Sixteen-String Jack had in his pocket a small dark lantern, and as they walked along he lighted it.

A bright beam of light came through the lens, and though this was by no means sufficient to light up the place in which they were, yet it enabled them to see to some extent where they were going.

As they advanced, they found the indentation in the side of the cavern increase rapidly in width and height.

Sixteen-String Jack directed the ray of light for them. Suddenly Tom King paused.

The passage became narrower, and the roof lower.

"Take care," he said; "the roof is much lower here, you had better stop here all of you."

As he spoke, he set the example of doing as he had directed, and continued on his way.

Claude Duval came last, but, either owing to his great height, or else to his not having stooped sufficiently, caught his head rather a violent blow against a sharp piece of rock, which hung down from the roof like a stunted icicle.

He uttered a cry, which instantly attracted his companions' attention, and they turned round, for, of course, they could not tell what had happened.

"Confound it," said Claude, "I have struck my head a tremendous blow against something."

He turned round as he uttered these words, and then perceived the curiously-shaped piece of rock which hung down from the centre of the roof of the passage in an exceedingly dangerous and awkward manner.

"This is it," he cried, the moment he saw it.

"Come on," Claude cried to his companions.

"All right, I am coming."

Our old friend had taken no heed of this piece of rock while he had been speaking, and now, instead of letting go of it, he gave it a vigorous pull.

It was the pain of the blow he had received which prompted him to do this as being a species of revenge.

But he was totally unprepared for the startling effect produced by this apparently simple action.

To his unutterable astonishment, the piece of rock came away in his grasp as he tugged at it, and immediately there came the rushing, roaring sound which had struck so much alarm to the heart of the captain of dragoons.

The roof of the passage had fallen in.

Fortunate for them was it that our friends did not linger while Claude did this.

If they had done so they could not possibly have escaped destruction.

As it was, Claude Duval almost paid with his life for what he done.

When he seized the piece of depending rock and pulled it, he was already in the act of following in the steps of his companions, and, ere the roof fell, he had got several paces.

To this alone can be attributed his escape.

Had he remained stationary, he must have been buried beneath the mass.

Even as it was, he felt himself suddenly prestrated to the earth by the earth falling upon him.

Both Turpin and Sixteen-String saw their companion's danger.

The first released himself from Maud, and the second dropped the lantern.

Together they darted forward, and, seizing Claude by both his arms, dragged him from his terrible situation.

Scarcely had they done so, than a fresh quantity of earth came rolling down, so that, if he had not been thus promptly extricated, he would have been smothered before their eyes.

He was so lucky as to escape with only a few slight bruises and a shake.

For some few moments there was such a cloud of dust that our friends could hardly breathe, but it subsided.

They were now in total darkness, for the lantern was extinguished by its fall.

Their situation now was terrible.

They could not tell how soon some other portion of the roof would fall and involve them in a common destruction.

The first thing Sixteen-String Jack did, after rescuing his friend, was to stoop down and grope after the lantern.

At length his hand encountered it, and, almost dreading to see what its light would reveal, he ignited it.

Upon the faces of all an expression of the greatest consternation was depicted.

Slowly Jack raised the lantern.

All eyes followed the direction of the bright beam of light, eager and yet dreading to see what it might disclose.

By chance it so happened that Jack's face was turned towards the spot where the roof had fallen in, and, as a matter of course, the light of the lantern turned in that direction also.

The same, or nearly the same sight, met their gaze as the captain of dragoons saw from the other side.

The way by which they had gained the spot upon which they stood was entirely blocked up with a mass of crumbling earth.

Speechless and surprised, they gazed upon this extraordinary phenomenon.

How to account for it they scarcely knew.

The only conclusion they could come to was that the piece of rock which Claude had seized was like the keystone of an arch, and alone supported the immense mass of earth above.

CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS FIND THEMSELVES IMPRISONED IN A LIVING TOMB.

THERE can be very little doubt that if this piece of rock had remained undisturbed much longer, it would have given way of itself.

It was manifestly inadequate to support so tremendous a weight, and Claude, seizing it as he did, only anticipated that which would ere long have taken place of its own accord.

Sixteen-String Jack directed the light of his lantern over every part of the fallen earth, but he did not speak.

Dick Turpin was the first to recover himself.

He spoke in a tone of encouragement to his companions.

"There is a barrier now," he said, "between our enemies and ourselves, which, I fancy, they will have some trouble to surmount."

"It has been a narrow escape for us," said Claude Duval, drawing a long breath as he thought of his own danger, "but we ought not to feel displeased at this accident, for the earth falling as it has, between our enemies

and ourselves, looks like a good omen, and will prove an insurmountable obstacle to them."

Sixteen-String Jack said nothing, but turned round.

A thought had occurred to him to which he felt he scarcely dared give utterance.

It was an awful one, and his heart fluttered strangely, and his hand shook.

His companions, however, did not appear to observe his agitation, or if they did they took no notice of it.

Perhaps they attributed it to the peril from which they had so recently escaped.

But such was not the cause of it.

It was a peril that was in perspective, and which did not seem to occur to the others at all.

Slowly, then, as we have said, he turned round until his back was towards the fallen earth.

Then he directed the light of the lantern before him, and glanced in that direction.

He could not repress a slight exclamation which rose to his lips, though he strove hard to do so.

Before him he should have seen a continuation of the passage.

But he did not.

The light of the lantern fell only upon an almost perfectly smooth piece of rock.

"Trapped!" he exclaimed. "My worst fears are realized."

These words at once made the others sensible of the extent of their danger.

"Trapped!"

All echoed his word.

They could do no more.

Tom King sprang forward, and Sixteen-String Jack flashed the lantern rapidly around him.

The only result which followed this, however, was the complete realization of what he had stated.

An examination of the place in which they were showed it to be a small and nearly circular cavern, the diameter of which was somewhere about fifteen feet.

Its height they could not estimate.

The rays of the lantern, when directed upwards, became lost in the deep gloom, and discovered no signs of a roof.

The falling earth had choked up the passage which led into this cavern, which was formed in some places of a kind of clayey soil, and in others of masses of rock.

They were prisoners, hopelessly prisoners, and as they gazed into each others' countenances, by the dim light which the lantern afforded, they saw nothing but the utmost consternation imprinted upon each.

Maud clung tightly to Dick's arm.

Her whole form was convulsed with terror.

It was excusable if they all felt appalled by their frightful situation.

The danger which they had just escaped seemed now to be not half so great as it had first appeared.

It was some moments before either of them could command their voices sufficiently to speak with calmness.

The silence of that dark and gloomy cavern was truly terrible and heart-chilling, while the darkness with which it was filled seemed to press upon their spirits like a pall.

It was during this strange and awful stillness that the dragons came into the recess, and arrived at the opposite side of the mass of earth which choked it up.

But our friends heard them not, and were altogether unconscious of their proximity.

The quantity of soil which separated them was so great that scarcely any sound, no matter how loud, would have been able to penetrate it.

Sixteen-String Jack roused himself from the state of abstract abstraction into which he, in common with the rest, had fallen.

Once more he waved his lantern around, and successfully let its light fall upon different portions of the walls of the cavern.

Almost mechanically the eyes of all looked upon its devious course, but without meeting with the least encouragement.

The damp walls of the cavern looked inexpressibly gloomy, and their spirits sunk still lower in their breasts.

Could they but have thought of some words of encouragement to utter to the rest, they would have spoken.

It was vain for them to try this, for there was nothing to suggest hopefulness.

Dick Turpin, feeling probably that he was looked up to as a chief by the others, was the first to shake off this apprehensive kind of nightmare which pressed so heavily upon them all.

But it was not until after he had made violent and repeated efforts that he was able to do this.

"My comrades," he said, in a voice shaken with emotion.

At the sound, all turned towards him, and Sixteen-String Jack raised the lantern, so that the bright beam of light which streamed through the lens should fall upon his countenance.

"My comrades," said Dick again, "in escaping from one danger we have fallen into one which seems to be of even a more terrible character. Before we had at least the chance which an encounter would have given us; now it seems we are imprisoned in the bowels of the earth. The examination we have already made has shown us that this cavern has, or had, but one entrance and exit. That is now choked up with many tons of earth—so many that it would be useless for us, with such inadequate tools as we possess, to attempt to tunnel our way through it. Here is a cheerless prospect, but yet I think we ought not to lose all hope."

Dick said this, but he did not feel it.

He was desirous, however—and it was a praiseworthy desire—to instil hope into the bosom of his companions, who he could tell had abandoned themselves to despair.

No one liked to say where are we to look for hope, or there seems no prospect of it, and yet that was precisely what all thought.

The probability that the circular cavern in which they stood would prove to them a living tomb was so frightfully strong that it seemed to paralyze all their energies.

Turpin's speech, however, produced one good effect.

It seemed to break the spell of silence which had fallen upon them.

Now that he had spoken, the others recovered the use of their speech.

They endeavoured, too, to speak in a strain which was at total variance with the state of their feelings.

It was Sixteen-String Jack who said—

"It is true we have not been able to discover any outlet as yet, but still, for all that, one may exist."

"When we searched, you must bear in mind we were in a state of great excitement, in consequence of the shock of alarm which we had received. When we have recovered our calmness, I should recommend that we commence our examination afresh."

"If we can but succeed in effecting our escape from this place," said Tom King, with a slight shudder, "the circumstance of the roof of the passage having fallen in will be a fortunate enough one."

"True," said Claude Duval; "and I think there is some consolation to be derived from the fact that I escaped being buried as I did."

"You have had two narrow escapes of your life, lately, Claude," said Turpin, "but as yet all is well."

"To be sure, my case has looked very desperate, but yet here I am, and not much the matter with me either," replied Claude; "so there is, to some, hope to be distilled out of that."

"It is to be hoped that things will turn out better than they at present promise to do," said Tom King.

"If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is burrowing in the earth in this manner," said Claude Duval; "and once let me get out of this scrape, and I don't think you will ever find me getting beneath the surface of the earth again."

"There is something very disagreeable about it, I admit," replied Dick Turpin. "But come, my comrades, this talk is all very well, and may, perhaps, in one way have done us some good. I propose, however, that we set about a careful and rigid examination of this cavern."

This proposition was immediately agreed to by all.

It would either have the effect of consigning them to despair, or else would fill their breasts with hope.

They did not dare to think of the consequences, should this second examination terminate in the same manner as the first.

Wisely they looked at the brightest side, and continued to hope on for the best.

Sixteen-String Jack handed the lantern to Dick Turpin,

who, the moment he received it, set about making this important examination—the result of which would be so serious.

Maud released the hold which she had hitherto maintained upon his arm, and, clasping her hands together, followed him in speechless anxiety.

Dick commenced his examination of the wall of the cavern at the spot where the earth had fallen in.

By this means he would be able to tell for certain when he had completed the circuit of it.

Some such mark as this was quite necessary.

The cavern walls looked very cheerless.

In most places they were damp with the moisture which exuded from the clay of which they were composed.

Strange fungic vegetation covered them in many places.

After examining the wall for some few paces, Dick perceived a cleft or fissure.

It was but small, and so narrow that it would not have admitted the person of one of them; still it might lead somewhere.

If so, then, the opening could be enlarged.

Under this impression he plunged his sword in.

But the blade penetrated a few inches only, and then struck against the rock with a sharp sound.

That hope, then, was destroyed, and he once more continued.

He did not hurry.

He well knew that there was time enough and to spare, and so he resolved that the examination should be a rigid one.

With this intent he let the bright beam of light rest for a moment upon every square inch of the wall, from the floor of the cavern up to as high a point as the ray would reach.

What was above, or how high the roof might be, he had no means of telling.

He only knew that it must be very many feet above their heads.

Gradually, then, Dick Turpin, accompanied by Maud and his three comrades, worked his way round the cavern.

At every step that was taken the frail hope into which they had cheated themselves faded away, until at length, when they reached the mass of fallen earth again without having found what they so anxiously sought, it was dissipated completely.

They were now forced to the conclusion that there was but one mode by which that strange, circular-looking cavern could be entered and left, and that was by the outlet which the earth had completely filled up.

There was not one now who dared to look into the countenances of their comrades.

Too well they knew the expression which appeared upon their own, and they desired to encounter it upon the countenance of another.

Dick Turpin groaned slightly, as he said—
“My friends, our last hope is over now. Our fate threatens to be a fearful one, but we must meet it with what boldness we can.”

“It is clear there is no means of leaving this place, and the consequences of a long stay here are so obvious that I need not mention them. It seems as though we were all destined to perish from starvation. If such is to be our fate, let us endeavour to meet it with firmness.”

A deep silence followed these words.

Under such circumstances, who could speak?

Death—lingering, painful death—stared them in the face.

It was impossible for them to escape.

They must remain where they were and perish by slow degrees.

To add to the inconveniences of their position, Dick now found that the lamp was beginning to burn dimly, and showing unequivocal symptoms of expiring.

Anxiously he inquired whether any of his comrades had the means to replenish it.

But they had not, and, after flickering for a few moments, the flame went out.

They were now plunged in total darkness.

The consolation that the light of the lamp would have afforded they were deprived of, and their situation, terrible as it was before, seemed now to redouble in horror.

It was now impossible for them to see each other, and

the only proof they had of the existence of their comrades was when they spoke or touched them.

A more deplorable condition than theirs now was could not be imagined.

Destitute of food, deprived of light, without fire, buried alive in the bowels of the earth without the faintest hope of release, such was the position of those whose fortunes we have followed with so much interest.

Everyone, now abandoned themselves to despair, and it is not to be wondered at that under such circumstances as these they lost all strength of mind.

In this state time passed slowly and wearily away.

How many hours elapsed they knew not.

They were dead to all such knowledge.

There was one thing which slowly forced its way upon their minds.

It was this.

The cavern had been examined by them and found to have no outlet.

Nevertheless they became aware that it was filled with fresh, cool air.

Where this came from was a mystery, and they were endeavouring to account for it, when they became conscious that a soft and gentle light was beginning to fill the place.

This at once brought the outer cavern to their recollection, which, as we have already described, was tolerably well lighted in the daytime by means of the crevices innumerable in the roof of it.

From some such cause as this the light, which now every moment increased in power, proceeded.

Wearily and listlessly they turned their eyes upward. They were right.

It was day, and the soft, beautiful light that illuminated the earth above came streaming down upon them.

It so happened that all looked up at precisely the same moment, so the discovery was made simultaneously.

A cry of hope and joy came from their lips.

The light came through the roof of the cavern, but, instead of finding its way through so many small openings as it did in the outer one, it came through one aperture of apparently considerable dimensions.

It was high above their heads; but, as the sun rose and the light increased, they were able to see the blue sky, upon which they had scarcely hoped to look again.

It was afar off, it is true; but still they derived some consolation from the bare fact of being able to look upon it.

“Hope! my friends, hope!” cried Dick Turpin, in almost joyous tones; “there is hope for us yet! Do you see that opening in the roof above? It is at a great height from the floor, but we must reach it by some means, and then our freedom will be secured.”

His companions shook their heads.

“Do not be sanguine, captain, over this.”

It appears to be about as easy for us to reach that opening as it does for us to bore a hole through the earth.

“Not so, not so,” cried Dick; “it will be, no doubt, a difficult task for the first person to reach the earth above us, but the others will have little trouble. The one who stands above will be able to render immense assistance to those below, and help them out of this place easily.”

“But how is the opening to be reached?”

“That is a point which we have plenty of time to consider; but, before we attempt to do anything, there are one or two things that we must take into consideration and consult upon.”

CHAPTER CCCXCV.

IN WHICH DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN EFFECTING HIS ESCAPE FROM THE CAVERN, AND STEALS UNAWARES UPON HIS FOES.

THE cheerful, animated tones in which Dick Turpin spoke could not fail to be productive of a good effect in the minds of his comrades.

They felt themselves revived by them, and roused from that despairing apathy into which they had been plunged.

They looked about them with better spirits, and prepared themselves to listen attentively to what their captain had to say.

The daylight, too, which found its way in and revealed their countenances to each other, had an invigorating

effect upon their spirits, and altogether the alteration in their feelings which now took place was really wonderful when contrasted with their state a few moments before.

Dick spoke:

"My comrades," he said, "in our anxiety to escape from this place we must not forget that the chase is occupied by our foes, to whom our sudden disappearance must seem almost marvellous. That they will search narrowly for us you may be sure, from the vigorous and determined manner in which they attacked us. Such being the case, it will be our most prudent course to remain here for a time, so as to give them an opportunity to withdraw."

To this all assented, but as they did so, they glanced up at the aperture so far above them, as much as to say, "It is well for us to talk of remaining when there is such a slight chance of our getting away."

Dick could tell this was the thought that occupied their minds, but he did not allude to it.

"I have more to say, my comrades," he continued, "if you will listen to me."

"You may depend upon our doing that, captain," they replied.

"Very well, then. Under the circumstances, then, I think even if we had the chance it would be very unsafe and unwise for us to leave this place until we had some knowledge respecting the dragons, or found out, in some way, that they had left the chase."

"Exactly, captain, but—"

"Nay, listen, and do not interrupt. I will be brief in what I have to say. This place serves us as a place of concealment, and I think there is little fear of our being discovered here by our foes. Is not that your opinion?"

"Most certainly."

"Then I will tell you what I have to propose, and I think, when you hear it, that you will agree with me that it is the best thing we can do."

"Speak, captain; we are all impatience."

"Fortunately, then, we have all made a hearty meal, and though we may be hungry, yet we can manage, no doubt, to go without food for some hours to come. I would recommend, then, that we stay here until night. By that time I doubt not the patience of the dragons will be exhausted, and they will withdraw for a time. We ought to ascertain, however, before we leave this place, whether they have gone or not."

"It would be quite as well, captain, but how is it to be done?"

"That is just the point. Now I think that I shall be able to reach the roof of the cavern, and if I can succeed in this, all will be well. I must confess I have no doubt about being able to do this in my own mind, and therefore, with your permission, we will suppose that it is done."

His comrades could not forbear smiling at the confident tone in which he spoke.

Unheeding this, however, he continued.

"When I reach the top, I shall want you all four to remain perfectly still where you are until I come back to you. My course of action will be this. As cautiously and stealthily as I can I shall make my way about the chase, and endeavour to discover whether the dragons have left or not. I shall be able to ascertain this beyond all doubt. If they have taken their departure, well and good. I will procure a rope or something of that kind by which I can assist you to leave this place. Then as to when we once stand under the sky again, future circumstances can alone determine."

The three highwaymen exchanged glances with each other while Turpin was speaking, and as soon as he had finished, Tom King said—

"If one of us can get out of the aperture above, all will be well. You say you have some scheme in your head for doing this?"

"I have."

"I rejoice to hear it. You will tell us what it is?"

"Of course."

"Then I have an amendment to propose."

"What is it?"

"Instead of going yourself, I will go."

"Nay, nay, Tom. I guessed what you were about to say, but I tell you, once for all, my mind is made up, and I will not allow myself to be turned by anyone!"

"And sorry you are so determined as you appear to be,

because I consider that it would have done quite as well if I had gone on this reconnoitring expedition."

"Don't oppose me, Tom. I have set my heart upon it."

"I shall not gainsay a word you may utter, captain."

"Very good, then. Do not press this. It will be useless if you do. I shall remain firm."

"That is enough, then."

"I am glad to hear you say as much. And now I think you will agree with me that it would be better if we were to remain here until nightfall."

"Decidedly."

"The dragons will be more likely to have taken their departure by that time than if I was to start now."

"We don't question that, captain."

"Well, then, the best thing we can do is to make ourselves as comfortable as we can in these uncomfortable quarters."

To this his comrades immediately assented; and such was the implicit confidence they had in him that they did not even urge him to tell them how he proposed to perform the apparently impossible task of climbing up to the roof of the cavern.

Having made up their minds as to what should be done, and feeling the amount of confidence in their leader which they did, the day passed away much more pleasantly than anyone would have expected.

To be sure, the brief winter's day seemed to them to equal the longest one in summer. But this is scarcely surprising.

As well as they could they relieved the monotony by conversation, and at length, towards mid-day, thoroughly overcome with fatigue and exhaustion, they laid down upon the damp floor of the cavern and slept.

They were aroused by some kind of noise.

What, they knew not, but they instinctively directed their gaze upward.

What they saw there was enough to unnerve them, and, if in their surprise they had shouted out, they could scarcely have been wondered at or blamed.

As it was, they remained silent.

They were so astonished and so absorbed that they were deprived of the power of utterance, until they became aware that it was necessary to their safety to remain silent.

The cause of the noise which had disturbed them became manifest at once.

Upon looking up to the orifice in the roof, they perceived that it was darkened by something which they could not at first make out, but almost immediately they discovered that several men were standing round the opening, and endeavouring to look down into it.

These could be no other than the dragons.

Our friends were not much alarmed at this, because they knew it was impossible for them to be seen by anyone standing on the brink of the pit, for such it would appear to be to anyone standing on the level ground in the chase.

The dragons were talking, and by listening attentively our friends could distinguish all they said.

"This is a strange looking place; that's all I can say about it," remarked one.

"You are right there."

"What should you take it to be?"

"A pit, unquestionably."

"That's what it is, I think myself."

"Do you think it can have any communication with the cavern?"

"Ah! there you puzzle me, comrade, and I feel myself unable to give an opinion."

"It might be so."

"As you say, it might."

"It's a very strange thing where those fellows can have disappeared to."

"Well, my conviction you already know; there is some secret passage leading out of that cavern. They have availed themselves of it, and are, doubtless, far enough away by this time."

"I fear you are right."

"I fear so too; and this enterprise, which promised to turn out so well, will prove a failure."

"I am afraid so, but if it does it will be no fault of ours. We have done the best we could."

"Very true, comrade, and I think we shall do little if any good by remaining here any longer. Have you any



[DICK TURPIN AND MAUD ESCAPING FROM THE CAVERN.]

idea whether the captain intends to stay, or what he was going to do?"

"No. That wound in his arm, which he at first thought nothing of, is playing the bear with him, and there is no knowing what he will do."

"There it is, but I am more disgusted with this police officers work now than ever."

"Don't get on to that subject. What do you think about this pit?" "The very fellows we want might be concealed in it."

"They might, but I don't think it's very likely. I'll tell you what we will do."

"What?" "Form round in a circle and fire a volley down into it."

"A good thought."

"Stop a moment comrades," said another voice; "do you see this large stone?"

"Well, then, instead of wasting our powder and shot by

firing down on them, let us roll the stone over and over until it falls in."

"Agreed; that is a capital idea."

"You see comrades," said the man who had proposed the expedient of rolling the stone down; "if the pit is deep the stone will break into a thousand pieces on the bottom, and if anyone is there we shall know of it, I'll warrant."

"Let us call out first," said another, "and let them know what we are going to do; perhaps they will call out."

"There can be no harm in trying."

"Call out, then."

"No, you."

"Very well, I have no objection."

One of the dragoons now advanced to the mouth of the pit.

What the feelings of our friends were when they heard this conversation, we will leave the reader to guess.

They did hear it, however, and every word too.

The man who had agreed to warn them of their fate now called out—

"Halloo! below there! Is there anyone below there?"

He listened for a moment, but no reply came; and then, turning round, he addressed his comrades, saying—

"I don't think there is anybody there. However, I think I will call out again."

"Here, I will," said another; "perhaps your voice is not loud enough."

"There's no fear of their not hearing you, Samv'l!" said the rest.

A tall, bulky dragoon now stepped forward, and placing his hand to his mouth, bawled out—

"Hullo! below there. If there is anyone below, speak up, as we are going to roll a stone down. Hullo! Below, I say!"

This dragoon had a voice as powerful as his form, and it reverberated with extraordinary loudness in the dome-shaped cavern.

Still no notice was taken of it.

The dragoons listened, but there came no sound from below to indicate the presence of a living creature.

"There's nobody there," said the dragoon with the powerful voice.

"Never mind, we'll roll the stone in for all that."

"Oh! yes, by all means, for they are quite artful enough to keep quiet."

"So they are; but if they don't cry out when they hear this stone come down upon them, it's odd to me."

The idea of the soldiers was that it was a pit into which they looked, and they never dreamt that it might grow larger towards the bottom.

With one accord they now set about their self-imposed task of rolling the stone.

It was an enormous fragment of rock, and required their united strength to move it.

Slowly and gradually they got it towards the brink of the abyss.

A deep indentation was left in the earth where they had rolled it.

At length it overhung the brink.

One more touch and it would plunge down, and would, in consequence of its weight, acquire considerable momentum in its descent.

It would almost seem as though the soldiers had some dim and indistinct consciousness that there was someone below, for, having thus far carried out their intention, they paused, and made another appeal to those below.

But the result was the same.

As before, their words were responded to only by the echoes of their own voices.

Resolved, then, to dally no longer, they put their shoulders to the stone.

There was one united effort of strength, and then it gave way.

The earth on the verge of the abyss crumbled, and fell down in a shower, like a presage of that which was about to follow.

Then, with a rushing sound, the huge stone disappeared.

The dragoons, as they stood on the brink, heard the hissing sound of the air which was displaced by its descent.

Animated by a universal and spontaneous impulse of curiosity, all crowded round the pit, and looked down into it, or rather strove to do so, for, of course, they could not see far down.

They could not see the stone, but they fancied they could.

Anxiously they listened for the sound which should indicate that it had reached the bottom.

It came.

Crash!

The immense mass of rock struck the stone floor of the cavern, and broke, as the dragoon had prophesied, into a thousand fragments.

But after the awful sound had reached their ears, and the strange echoes which it raised had died away, they listened in vain for any cry or groan which should testify to the presence of those they were so eager to find.

The silence of the very grave itself ensued, and, after listening for a long time, the dragoons were compelled to confess themselves defeated in their expectation, and turned disappointedly away.

Unwillingly they were forced to come to the conclusion that they were mistaken, and they had no other resource than to recommence their search elsewhere.

This, as we know, would be resultless, and so we will not follow them on their bootless expedition, but relate how our friends fared when the heavy stone was rolled down upon them.

We have already stated that, by straining their sense of hearing to the utmost, they could hear almost every word of the conversation that took place between the dragoons, who spoke in rather a loud tone of voice.

The danger did not therefore fall upon them unawares.

They had time to think and devise some means of safety.

But this seemed to be impossible.

The floor of the cavern was, of course, very much larger in area than the opening in the roof, but still there was nothing to hope for in that circumstance.

There could be very little doubt that the stone would break into fragments, and that those pieces would fly with incredible velocity in every direction.

That none of these would strike our friends appeared in the highest degree improbable.

Indeed, they were threatened with severe injuries from them.

How were they to escape?

That was the question that immediately suggested itself to their minds, and they looked about them anxiously.

It was a question of such vital importance, that it had the effect of driving all others from their minds.

The dragoons spoke, but they heeded not their words—they were very thankful to think they had so much the more time left them for reflection, and to make their preparations.

"There is only one thing we can do," said Dick, hurriedly, after having looked around him. "There is only one thing that we can do, and that is far from being so safe and good as I could wish."

"What is it, Dick?" asked his comrades anxiously, for in that hour of imminent peril they naturally looked up to him as their leader. "Let us know what it is at once!"

"We had better all lie down," replied Turpin, "and get as close to the wall of the cavern as we can. That is our only chance. The fragments which will be chipped off the stone by its fall will have a natural tendency to fly upwards, and this is the sole means by which we can avoid them."

"We will do it," cried his comrades, in a suppressed voice. "We are saved from that danger at least."

"What we have most to apprehend," rejoined Dick Turpin, "is the large stone. But hasten, my comrades. Quick! quick, or we shall be too late!"

Not another word was said.

Choosing different parts of the cavern, our friends laid themselves down at full length on the floor of it, and turned their faces towards the wall.

Breathlessly, then, they awaited the result.

They heard the earth clatter down, and the next moment the huge piece of rock came swinging through the air.

CHAPTER CCCXCVI.

PARTICULARLY DESCRIBES THE EXTRAORDINARY MANNER IN WHICH TURPIN ESCAPED FROM THE CAVERN, INVOLUNTARILY all suspended their breath.

They continued to do so while the stone descended.

It would be a vain task to endeavour to describe their feelings during this brief interval of time, and therefore we shall not attempt it.

The sensations apparently of hours were compressed into a few seconds.

They could not tell what would be the result of the fall of the fragment of rock.

It might be that one or more of them would be dangerously hurt, perhaps killed.

They were powerless to do anything to avert either. At length, after to them an interval of sickening horror, the crash came.

It was terrific.

It smote upon their ears as no other sound had hitherto done.

The stone, striking upon the mass of rock of which the floor of the cavern was composed, was dashed to atoms.

The small fragments flew about like hail.

For about a second this fearful shower lasted, and then all was over.

The fragments struck against the walls of the cavern, and rebounded with incredible violence.

Soon, however, they all lay still upon the floor of the cavern, which was literally covered with the remains of the huge stone.

Then on by one our friends ventured to look up, each anxious to know whether the other had escaped.

Fortunately such was the case.

The precaution which Dick had suggested, and which had been adopted, was proved to be a good one.

As he had stated, the pieces that were chipped off by the violence of the concussion all flew upwards, and, from the position they occupied, they escaped without sustaining any injury whatever.

It was with the utmost joy they learned that they all had escaped the frightful peril with which they had been so fearfully menaced.

They crowded round each other, and expressed their satisfaction in whispers, for they were fearful of any sound reaching the listening ears above.

As they glanced upwards they could distinguish the dark forms of the dragoons as they bent over the abyss, and strove to pierce the obscurity which hid all things from their sight.

Our friends, however, were looking from darkness into light, and the forms of the dragoons were clearly defined against the morning sky.

At length they withdrew, and after waiting for a little while in silence, our friends ventured to speak with less restraint to each other.

Still they were cautious to a degree, for it was impossible for them to be sure that there was not one of their foes listening attentively above.

"We have one more narrow escape to be thankful for," Dick Turpin observed at length. "Believe me, I scarcely dared to hope that we should all remain unhurt as we have done."

"It is entirely owing to the excellence of the means you devised, captain," replied Tom King.

"Let us hope that we shall never be exposed to so terrible a danger again," said Sixteen-String Jack, shivering as he spoke.

"We must not forget," added Turpin, "that this circumstance will now turn out to our benefit. Our foes having, as we have seen, assured themselves that we are not here, will search for us elsewhere, and the chances are a thousand to one against their making any further examination of this place; consequently it will be the most secure place for us to remain in that can be imagined."

"You are right enough there," said Claude Duval; "but there is one thing which you must not overlook."

"What is that?"

"We are without provisions, and, consequently, for us to remain here longer is a sheer impossibility."

"I grant that freely. But do not for a moment imagine that I had forgotten anything about this. It is a great drawback; but what I have to propose is this. As soon as night comes on I will leave the cavern—or, at any rate, try to do so—and, when I have gained the open air, I shall reconnoitre the enemy. Doubtless, while on this excursion, I shall be able to obtain some provisions, and, if so, all will be well."

"But, supposing," said Tom King, "that you have succeeded in reaching the upper air—by-the-bye, I don't see how you are to do it—supposing it done, however, what shall you try to do?"

"Why, in the first place, to ascertain the whereabouts of our foes. When that much is accomplished, I should endeavour to find out as much respecting their movements as I could. If I thought they would remain here for a length of time, I would procure some provisions and rejoin you; if, on the contrary, I found they were about to leave the chase, I should keep in their track and watch their departure. I should assure myself that all left, and left without the intention of returning, and should notice whether any straggler was left behind or not. Then I should obtain the means of releasing you from this dungeon, for such it might well be called;

after having done which, it would be quite time to consult and decide upon our future plan of operations."

"That sounds all very well, captain," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but the enterprise which you propose to undertake is both a difficult and a dangerous one."

"I am aware of that," rejoined Turpin; "and now that you know my intentions, let us consider the matter as settled. I shall be displeased if any one wishes to take my place."

This was enough.

The three highwaymen had too much respect for their captain to gainsay him in anything.

As for Maud, she did not speak.

She merely pressed tightly on Dick's arm.

After what he had said she would not have dreamt of raising her voice in opposition to his.

She trembled at the frightful amount of danger which, as a matter of course, he would incur, and which would be perfectly unavoidable.

Nevertheless, she had confidence in Dick's powers.

He had ere now been the hero of adventures apparently far more dangerous, and why should he not succeed in the present instance?

Maud believed that he would succeed, and this conviction was a great consolation to her.

She knew that they must all perish if some means of leaving the cavern could not be found.

About the achievement of this task Dick had spoken with great confidence.

But his companions appeared to look upon it as an impossibility.

If he was so much better able to overcome this difficulty than they were, why should it not be the same with all the rest?

From these considerations, then, did Maud forbear to utter a single word of remonstrance against his departure.

She deserved all praise for this manifestation of sound sense.

She looked upon the matter in a proper light, but there are few who would have looked upon it in this manner.

She did so, however, and Dick was pleased with her for it.

As for his comrades, they no longer continued to press their point.

Tom King, however, spoke.

"You have told us what you intend to do when you reach the upper air, captain," he said, "but you have not told us how you intend to leave this cavern."

"You will see in good time."

"But I am full of anxiety upon the point. Alay my curiosity, for I cannot help deeming it an impossibility. Could I be shown that it was not, I should feel all the more content."

Tom King was warmly seconded in this appeal by the two other members of the band, and Turpin, unable to withstand their importunities, consented to explain this to them.

He spoke as follows—

"When I was a boy," he said, "I saw a man—a mountebank—perform a feat very similar to the one I am about to attempt. At the time I saw him I was much struck with it, and the natural result of this was that I practised the feat continually until I was able to accomplish it."

At this commencement, the highwaymen prepared themselves to listen to what he had to say with redoubled interest.

"I will describe what I saw as well as I am able. An upright piece of wood was fixed in the ground. Its height appeared to be about thirty feet. The shape of this piece of wood was square, and it was perfectly straight. It was fixed in an upright position on the village green, where the exhibition took place. This post, if such I might term it, was pierced with circular holes, each about an inch in diameter, and at a distance of about two feet from each other. These holes commenced a short distance from the ground and were continued to the top."

"Do you mean that two sides of the square post were pierced in this manner, captain?" asked Claude Duval.

"Yes."

"I understand."

Dick continued.

"The mountebank now came forward and invited the company to observe this exercise of muscular strength, for

so termed it. He held in his hand two round pieces of wood. They were about ten inches in length, and about three quarters of an inch in diameter, so that they would fit easily in the holes drilled in the post, as I have mentioned. These pieces of wood having been inspected, he told one in each hand as one might a dagger. Advancing to the post, he raised his arm as high above his head as he could, and made a stab at the post. So correct was his aim, that the piece of wood he held in his hand entered one of the holes drilled to receive it. Keeping his body in a perpendicular position, this man raised himself off the ground slowly and gently by the mere strength of the muscles in his arm and in the hand wherewith he grasped the stick. He continued so to raise himself until his head was level with this peg, for the piece of wood, when thrust into the post in the manner I have described, had that appearance. Having done this much, he raised his other arm high above his head and thrust the piece of wood he held in it into the hole which was next above him. With this hand he raised himself in precisely the same manner, and continued to repeat this action until he had reached the top of the post, upon which a broad flat piece of wood was fixed, and on this he seated himself."

"It was a very remarkable feat," said Sixteen-Spring Jack, "and one that I have never seen or heard of."

"Nor I—nor I," coincided his companions.

"Of course," continued Dick, "the feat was a wonderful one from the amount of muscular strength necessary to perform it."

"Just so."

"One word more, and I have done; this man repeated the feat several times in succession, sometimes ascending with incredible speed and at other times very slowly. All this time, you must understand, his body hung down in a perpendicular position."

"Yes, but"—

"Wait a moment, and let me finish. As I told you, I was much struck with this feat, so much so that I practised it continually, and at length was able to perform it with as much dexterity as the man I had seen do it!"

"You will excuse me, captain," said Claude Duval, bluntly, "but although I have listened with great attention and interest to what you have just been saying, for the life of me I can't see how you are going to turn this to any account."

"Well, wait a little while and I will show you," replied Turpin, good humouredly; "I shall be able to do that much better than I shall be able to explain it. It will be dark ere long."

This conversation, which we have just set down, lasted for a considerable period, for we have given all that was said as briefly as possible.

A long time had elapsed since the stone had been hurled into the cavern, and since the dragoons had taken their departure, and the short winter's day was rapidly drawing to a close.

In a little while Turpin would put into execution his scheme for leaving the cavern.

His companions were full of curiosity upon the point, but he would not satisfy them.

At last he commenced his preparations.

He first produced from his pocket a strong, dagger-like knife.

It did not shut into a handle, but fitted into a sheath.

It was remarkably strong, and Tom King carried one exactly like it.

This Dick now asked for, and it was immediately given him.

Thus provided, our hero walked round and round the cavern, narrowly inspecting the walls. Passing before one particular spot, he glanced upwards.

"Now," he cried, "I am going to try my scheme, and you will no longer be in ignorance of what it is. I hope I shall be successful in what I am about to attempt."

His three companions, when they saw him with these two dagger-like knives in his hands, seemed to have some dim notion of his purpose, but all was doubt and uncertainty.

We have before had occasion to remark that the walls of the cavern differed widely in character.

In some places they were composed of solid rock, in others of clay, and in others of clay and small-sized pieces of stone mixed.

was before a part of the wall of this description that Dick Turpin paused, and from previous observation during daylight, he was aware that it continued of the same quality up to the top.

Going close up to it, he raised one hand in the manner he had described, and then, striking one fierce blow, he buried the dagger-like knife up to the haft in the earth.

Our friends then understood in a moment what he was about to do, and they shook their heads, for they believed such a feat to be utterly impossible.

In a similar way to the mountebank they now saw that it was Dick's intention to plunge these knives into the side of the cavern, and, trusting to their hold, raise himself up by slow degrees.

Dick saw them shake their heads, and noted the incredulous expression on their countenances; but, paying no attention to it, he set about the very difficult task before him.

When led by the spirit of emulation to imitate the deeds of the mountebank, Dick little thought that this one would prove to be of such service to him.

Without having practised this feat he could never have performed it.

The first time he had stuck the blade of the knife into the wall of the cavern it was merely by way of experiment.

The principal thing he had to ascertain was whether this would suffice to sustain his weight.

He tried, and was overjoyed to find that, though the knife bent slightly, it showed no symptoms of giving way.

His heart was now comparatively light, and, with feelings of great confidence at his heart, he set about commencing his ascent in good earnest.

Requesting his comrades to stand beneath, so as to catch him should he be unlucky enough to fall, he clutched the hilt of the knife tightly, and drawing himself up until his head was almost on a level with it, he stuck the other knife in about two feet higher up, and sustained himself by that.

He now discovered that to extricate this lower knife was no easy matter, but at a second attempt he succeeded in doing so, and again, drawing himself up, stuck it in at a considerable distance from the ground.

A more fatiguing exercise for the muscles, or one that would tax them more, could scarcely be found.

Dick Turpin, however, had inured himself to this exercise, and though a long time elapsed since he had had any practice, yet he was pleased to find that he had lost none of his former strength and skill.

With eager anxiety and suspense, his companions watched his ascent, fearful, every moment, of witnessing an accident.

Slowly and steadily, however, Dick continued to get higher and higher, until his form was almost lost to view in the gathering gloom.

As he approached the surface of the earth he spoke encouragingly to his comrades below, and expressed his conviction that he should be able to accomplish the task he had set himself.

Upwards he went, until at length he found that one more effort would suffice to place him on the turf in old Enfield Chase.

Summoning up all his energies for this last effort, he raised himself up, and, with a tremendous exercise of strength, swung himself on to the earth.

A faint cheer from his comrades below reached his ear. But, entirely overcome with his exertions, he lay for some moments on the grass without being able to move.

CHAPTER CCCXCIV.

DICK WATCHES THE DRAGONS LEAVE ENFIELD CHASE.

AND PAYS ONE MORE VISIT TO THE OLD CAVERN.

What words could possibly convey an adequate idea of the feeling of thankfulness which crept—not over the heart of Maud—but over the hearts of those who stood by her side when they found that the daring feat which their leader had proposed was thus successfully carried out!

Now that he had reached the surface, all experienced a feeling of great security—perhaps greater than was warranted by circumstances.

For a moment they were oblivious of the presence of the dragons in the chase, and that Dick might be captured by them.

Soon, however, they recollected this; but they then relied upon the confidence they had in their captain.

That he would be cautious in the extreme, they felt certain; and that he would run into no unnecessary danger they were assured—not only for his own sake, but for theirs, who, without his aid, would surely perish in that place.

It was under the impulse of the moment that they uttered the faint cheer when they found he had reached the ground in safety.

Then they listened intently for some sound from their captain's lips; but for a little while, which seemed to them an age, none came.

Quickly, however, Dick Turpin recovered himself from the effects of his late exertion, and fully anticipating that his comrades would expect him to speak to them, he crawled closer to the brink of the abyss.

Holding his head over, he looked down, but he found that those below were totally invisible.

It was just as though he had plunged his gaze into some fathomless gulf.

Nor could he discover anything that would lead any one to the belief that it was a cavern; on the contrary, its appearance was only that of a deep and irregular-shaped pit.

But, if his friends were out of the reach of his vision, they were assuredly not out of the reach of his voice, and he at once addressed them.

As they looked up, however, they could see his head plainly enough.

"All is well, my faithful comrades," said Dick Turpin—"all is well. So much of my enterprise I have performed with safety and success. Let us gather encouragement from it as to the remainder. Stay where you are, rest yourselves in perfect security, and await, with what patience you may possess, my return. As soon as I have ascertained that it will be safe for you to leave this place of refuge, I will come here with such means and appliances as will enable you to do so. Until then, farewell. Do nothing—attempt nothing until I return. You may be sure that I shall not be long."

Dick Turpin's companions responded heartily to his farewell, and then our hero, rising slowly to his feet, took a long and earnest gaze about him.

Nothing but the green trees, however, and the waving undergrowth met his gaze, nor did any sounds strike upon his ears save those which were common to the forest.

No traces either remained of his enemies who had been so lately upon that spot, save where the ground had been trampled by their heavy boots.

The necessity of using the utmost caution in all his movements was clearly before Dick's mind.

Trees grew thickly and plentifully around, so that there was no difficulty about keeping under cover.

He glided, therefore, to a tree, the girth of whose trunk was unusually great, and from this point, feeling more secure, he gazed about him, and endeavoured to form something like a correct idea as to his precise whereabouts.

Short as had been Dick's residence in Enfield Chase, it had sufficed for him to make himself tolerably familiar with the whole of it, and quite so with respect to that portion of it which environed the cavern where he had hoped to remain in safety with his comrades for a much longer period than fate had allowed.

Such being the case, it was not long before he was in a position to say with certainty just in what direction to go in order to reach the entrance to the cavern.

To this point he had determined to repair with all the stealth he possibly could, for, reasonably enough, he conjectured that it was here where he would most likely be able to learn something about the motions of his foes.

With great caution, then, taking care not to make more noise than he could possibly avoid, and darting from tree to tree, he made his way in a circuitous manner to the place he wished to reach.

Every time he paused he listened, but, hearing nothing indicative of the proximity of the dragons, he continued to creep onwards.

As he drew nearer to the entrance to the cavern, his vigilance increased.

The same stillness prevailed, however, and he could almost have brought himself to believe that the dragons had already left the wood.

Satisfactory as it might be to him if they had done this, yet he would much rather have watched their departure, because then he would be in possession of positive intelligence in the matter, and, in the former case, it would have merely been conjecture.

This silence, however, was both strange and suspicious, and our hero could only account for it by supposing that they had either left the wood, or else were all in the cavern.

Nearer and nearer he approached, until at length, as he stood behind a tree, he was able to see the face of the rock in which the indentation was that led to the cavern.

Here were evident signs of the presence of his foes.

The grass was trampled down, the branches of the bushes broken, and the thorn-bush that had so well concealed the entrance to the cavern, had been uprooted, and lay withering and dying on the ground.

In contrast with its former aspect, this spot now presented an appearance of utter desolation.

Dick sighed as he saw this, for he had almost begun to love the place, which would probably no longer afford a shelter for them.

A profound stillness reigned about this spot, and at length, so long did it continue, that Dick felt almost inclined to venture into the passage.

Very fortunately, however, he did not do this.

While he was debating the matter in his mind he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps.

They were at a distance, and came from the direction of the cavern.

Several persons were evidently coming, and Dick Turpin glanced upwards at the branches of the tree beneath which he was standing, and resolved to hide himself among them; for his present place of concealment was scarcely deserving of the name, and he ran, in consequence, a great risk of being discovered.

It so happened that this tree had a horizontal projecting branch, the distance of which, from the ground, was barely eight feet.

This was just what Dick wanted.

Giving a slight spring, he seized hold of this branch with his hands, and easily and rapidly drew himself up into the tree.

It was an evergreen, and the large leaves which grew upon it formed an excellent and most effective screen.

He had just time to settle himself in a secure position, when a dragon made his appearance at the mouth of the passage.

He was followed by another, and another, until Dick counted, in all, fifteen.

But they were not all dragons though all wore a species of uniform.

Two were surgeons, and two of the dragons were carried by their companions upon rudely-constructed litters.

These were the two who had been so dangerously wounded by the bullets from the highwaymen's pistols.

The surgeons walked by the side of the litters.

The captain had his arm in a sling, and his face was expressive both of pain and vexation.

The result of this adventure, so different to what he had expected, annoyed and chagrined him exceedingly.

He had had all this extra trouble, had received a wound, had had two of his best men badly hurt, and had gained nothing whatever in return.

Under these circumstances, it is not wonderful that he should feel so mortified as he did.

A dejected, jaded look was also visible upon the countenances of the other dragons, who, of course, had been much harassed by their service, and scarcely one had escaped receiving a wound of some sort or other.

Much wondering what this little procession meant, Dick looked earnestly at them.

They all came to a halt as soon as they had emerged from the passage, but this our hero easily understood.

It was in order that the bearers of the litters might be changed.

As soon as this was done the captain gave the word to march, and in a compact though the troop of dragons directed their steps across the chase.

From the tree in which he was hidden, Dick was able

to command an extensive prospect, and some moments elapsed before the soldiers got out of sight.

As soon as ever he found himself unable to perceive them, our hero quitted his place of concealment and hastened after them.

To know in their track was an easy enough matter, for so many persons forcing a path through the brushwood rendered the way they had taken plainly perceptible. For the dragons took no pains to disguise their route.

At a cautious distance, Dick followed them.

His heart was elated with the idea that his foes, thoroughly weary of their search, were about to leave the chase.

To ascertain whether he was right was his motive for following them as he did.

The supposition was not at all an unlikely one, and from the direction they took, Dick became more and more confirmed in his notion, for if they did not change their course, they would in a short time reach the borders of the chase.

With increasing hope at every step, Dick crept after them.

Occasionally the sound of their voices, and the jingling of their weapons would reach his ear, but he was unable to hear what was said, and to have approached them more closely would be dangerous to a degree.

Wisely, then, he restrained his curiosity, and maintained the same distance between them.

As they drew nearer to the borders of the chase, where the trees were not of such huge dimensions, and where they grew at a greater distance apart, Dick's progress became exceedingly difficult, and the chances of his being seen were very much increased.

He was forced at length to adopt the expedient of crawling on his hands and knees.

By this means he was enabled to advance without exposing his form to observation.

Suddenly, however, he was forced to come to a halt, for the dragons no longer continued to advance.

Looking up stealthily, our hero saw that they had now reached the confines of the chase.

The bushes, which had so far afforded him a shelter, extended only a few yards further.

Beyond these grass grew, and on this spot the horses belonging to the dragons were grazing.

"Surely," Dick thought, "I shall now know for certain whether it is their intention to leave the chase or not. Patience, and no doubt I shall learn all."

The litters were now deposited upon the grass, and the dragons began to prepare to mount their horses.

The captain was assisted into the saddle by two of his men, for the state of his arm would not allow him to mount unaided.

All, then, followed his example save four, and these had to carry the wounded men.

The surplus horses were led by the bridle.

When this much was done, the little cavalcade again set itself in motion.

But they went only at a walking pace, for the condition of their comrades would not permit them to go faster.

Most eagerly did our hero watch them, until he was unable to do so any longer.

He waited a minute or two, until he thought it was safe, and then crossed the open space.

He could now see them once more, though they vanished from his view almost immediately.

Still he knew that they had really left the chase.

At this scarcely hoped-for departure of his foes the exultation of Dick Turpin knew no bounds, but all at once he subdued down as the thought occurred to him that some members of the troop might yet be left in the chase.

He had rather a large number depart, it is true, but there was no evidence to show that all had gone.

It was well he made this reflection when he did, or he might have incautiously run into much danger.

What he should next do was rather a puzzling question, out, after some few minutes' reflection, he came to the conclusion that, if any dragons had been left behind, they would most likely be in the cavern.

Towards this place, then, he resolved at all risks to repair.

The bright and beautiful moon, which was only a few

days past the full, was high in the unclouded heavens, and enabled him to see about him with great distinctness.

At length, upon passing a tree which had a small piece of its bark chipped off, as it seemed, with a knife, Dick turned, and, after a momentary hesitation, changed the direction in which he had been going.

He just then recollected that these pieces had been chipped off in order that they might readily find their way to the tree to which the spy had been bound.

Curious to learn something respecting him, Dick made his way towards this tree.

He reached it in a few moments, and then discovered, as he had more than half expected, that his prisoner had gone.

Dick thought very likely he had been released by his comrade Jack, but we happen to know that this was not the case.

The spy had got off without any one to help him but himself.

Recollecting that he had been bound with rope, and that this would now be useful in the highest degree to him, Turpin looked about for it.

He succeeded in finding nearly all of it.

There were several yards, and he took possession of it with a feeling of great satisfaction.

Having done this, he once more made his way towards the cavern.

The distance was considerable, and some time necessarily elapsed before he reached it, because his safety demanded that he should proceed with caution.

At length he came in sight of the opening.

This faced the direction in which the moon beams fell, and, in consequence, the rock could be seen with great distinctness.

The moon's rays penetrated a little way into the passage.

But they revealed nothing but the bare earth, and the rugged sides of the rock.

A deep silence prevailed in this place, and the longer Dick stopped and listened, the more did he feel convinced that his foes had taken their departure.

Eventually he made up his mind, after arguing the matter pro and con for some time, that he would at all risks enter the cavern, and ascertain whether it was empty or not.

He was well aware that the danger he would incur by this proceeding would be of no common description, but, considering the importance of the knowledge he would gain, he thought he ought to make the attempt.

Having come to this determination, and encouraged by the silence which still continued, he crossed over the little open space, and in a moment stood just within the passage.

Here he paused and listened.

But he could hear nothing, and on tip-toe he proceeded towards the cavern.

As a precautionary measure, he drew his sword and projected it before him.

He would then be prepared should any sudden attack be made upon him, or should he run into an unexpected danger.

At every few yards he took he would stop and listen, and then, encouraged by the unbroken silence, would advance.

In his progress he felt certain that he made a scarcely audible sound.

Of course the passage was buried in profound darkness, but he was familiar with all its intricacies.

He strained his eyes in a vain endeavour to pierce the gloom, for every moment he expected to see a gleam of light come from the direction of the cavern, for should anyone be there, it was scarcely likely they would remain in darkness.

CHAPTER CCCXCVIII.

DICK TURPIN SUCCEEDS IN RESCUING HIS COMPANIONS FROM THE CAVERN.

BUT NO GLEAM CAME.

Both the silence and the darkness of the tomb prevailed in that gloomy region, and, the nearer Dick got to the termination of the passage, the more convinced did he feel that he was the only living human being anywhere near the place.

Nevertheless, he did not abate his caution, for he remembered that a barricade had been erected, and he knew not whether it had been removed.

If not, he would have to take care to avoid any contact with it.

As he slowly put one foot before the other, assuring himself before he placed it on the ground that there was no obstacle before him, he found, by the difference in the temperature of the atmosphere, that he had really entered the cavern, so that the barricade, it was clear, had been removed.

It was equally clear, too, that the cavern was empty.

Our hero now became conscious that a faint, misty kind of twilight found its way into this place, and, glancing upwards, he perceived that it proceeded from the rays of the moon finding their way through the crevices in the roof.

As the Queen of Night rose higher and higher in the heavens, this hazy twilight increased in brightness, and Dick Turpin quickly became able to see about him with tolerable ease.

One by one, the many and well-remembered features of the old cavern came into view, until, after standing for a little while near the entrance of the passage, he was able to observe the whole outlines of the place.

The pale moonbeams, penetrating through those small apertures above, had an exceedingly beautiful effect.

As soon as he found himself able to discern one object from another, Dick Turpin moved from the spot upon which he had been standing, and confident that there was no other person in the cavern besides himself, he walked boldly to the centre of it.

Unconsciously he paused close to the hearthstone, and he almost instantly became sensible of an increase of warmth.

The cause of this was, of course, no mystery to him, and with the point of his sword he stirred together a few embers that were upon the stone.

They were at the point of extinction, but by stirring them about Dick succeeded in procuring a blaze.

It was a fitful one, it is true, but still it served to light up the cavern with a much greater degree of brilliancy than the moonbeams.

There was no longer any need for apprehension, for had any person been in the cavern besides Dick, his presence would ere now have been manifested.

Still, he held his drawn sword in his hand in an attitude ready for immediate service, so as to guard against the possibility of a surprise.

Some more dry twigs were close at hand, and these he cast on the fire as soon as he perceived them.

A bright light was the result.

Very cautiously, now, Dick looked about him.

On every side he saw traces of the recent presence of his foes, but nothing to lead him to the belief that they would return.

The conviction that they had in earnest taken their departure deepened in his mind; and he resolved, without further loss of time, to release his companions from their unpleasant place of refuge.

The thought, however, occurred to him, that he was but ill-provided with the means of doing this, and that in the cavern he might very likely find something of great use, which had been left behind by his foes.

In a moment, then, he took a fire-brand from the hearth, and commenced an examination of the cavern.

Almost the first thing he saw was a coil of thick rope lying upon the floor.

What it had been brought there for, he could easily guess; and he supposed that it had been left where he found it through negligence or accident.

Dick seized it with an exclamation of pleasure.

It was of great length; and with the pieces he already had in his possession, he should, doubtless, have sufficient for his purpose.

This was a good commencement to his search, and he continued it with additional ardour.

He found nothing, however, that promised to be of the least service to him; and rightly imagining that his companions would feel uneasy at his long absence, he resolved to return to them without delay.

Accordingly, he made his way towards the entrance of the passage, which he traversed with as much speed as he could command; and, in the space of a minute or two, found himself in the open air.

To reach the upper ground in which the hole was situated, he was compelled to make a considerable

detour; for to climb up the perpendicular face of the rock was an impossibility.

But Dick's heart was light and his steps fleet, so that a very short time elapsed before he reached his destination.

Lying down at full length upon the ground, he held his head as far over the abyss as he dared.

Before he had time to speak himself, he was addressed by his friends below.

To them an endless time appeared to have elapsed since his departure, and their eyes had been continually directed towards the aperture in the roof, in the hope every moment that they would see him make his appearance.

They had cheated the time of much of its tediousness by conferring together upon their future prospects, and endeavouring to come to some conclusion as to the best course of action to be adopted by them in future.

In this Mand felt but little interest.

Her thoughts were wholly occupied in thinking about our hero, and wondering whether he was in safety, or whether he had fallen into the hands of his enemies.

No sounds of alarm had reached her ears, though she knew that Enfield Chase was large enough for a great disturbance taking place in one portion of it to be unheard in another.

Her heart beat with joy when she saw him approach the aperture, for she did not dream it could be anyone but he whom she had so anxiously expected.

"All is well," said Dick Turpin, in reply to the salutation of his comrades: "I have the best of all news to communicate. The dragons have left the chase; I saw them depart myself!"

The three highwaymen uttered a faint hurrah, and then Claude Duval said—

"I am glad to hear that, captain; and the next thing will be to get us out of this place."

"That shall be done as soon as possible," said Turpin, in a cheerful voice; "I have a good deal to do, though, in the way of preparation."

As he spoke he rose to his feet, and proceeded to make an examination of the rope.

He found he had a pretty large quantity—even more than he thought he should require.

The first thing he did was to tie all the pieces of rope together, having done which he tied one end firmly to the tree that grew nearest to the aperture, and pulled it with all his strength, to make sure it was perfectly secure.

He had at first intended to tie some large knots in this rope to facilitate the process of climbing up it, but he suddenly thought of a fresh expedient, which would answer to the purpose much better.

This was to cut down some pieces of wood from the branches of the trees, each about eight inches in length.

These he resolved to tie in the rope in such a manner that they should be horizontal to it, and thus form a rude kind of ladder.

With one of the knives he carried it was perfectly easy to cut these pieces of wood, for there was no lack of material.

This, then, was his next proceeding.

Although it took him but a few minutes to cut each one, yet as a great many were required, the operation naturally ran into a great deal of time.

At length having, as he fancied, cut as many as he required, he proceeded to tie them in the rope.

This was an easy matter.

All he had to do was to tie the rope into a loop, thrust the prepared piece of wood into it, and draw it tight, so that the tighter the rope was pulled the firmer would the horizontal pieces become.

They were fixed at rather irregular distances, but the average was about a foot.

At last Dick completed this rude kind of rope-ladder, and announced the fact to his companions.

All that now remained was to ascertain whether it was long enough to reach the bottom of the cavern, but Dick had estimated this, and felt very little doubt.

Nevertheless, he lowered it with a slight feeling of anxiety.

Eagerly and joyfully did our old friends Tom King, Claude Duval, and Sixteen-String Jack watch its descent. They were thoroughly tired of their present quarters.

and had been for a long while, so that this prospect of escape was really delightful.

Suddenly Dick, as he was lowering the rope, felt it become tight, and, at the same moment, a cry from below announced to him the fact that his companions had reached it.

"Pull it tight!" he cried, when he found they had taken hold of it.

He was willingly obeyed.

In another moment the rope was pulled quite tight.

"Hang upon it with all your weight," said Dick, "in order that we may know whether it will be safe to ascend by it."

This was immediately done, as the importance of obtaining this piece of knowledge was obvious.

The rope stood the test bravely.

The three highwaymen were now impatient to ascend, but Turpin requested them to wait a moment.

They did so, and then, somewhat to their surprise, they saw him lower himself over the brink of the abyss and commence a rapid descent.

In less time than they could have believed possible, he was standing among them.

With a low cry of joy Maud sprang forward, and Dick clasped the devoted girl fervently in his arms.

So great was her joy at thus finding him in safety by her side, that it was only with the greatest difficulty that she prevented herself from fainting.

Turpin turned round to his comrades.

"Ascend, my gallant friends," he cried; "the means of escaping from this dismal place are before you. Ascend with all convenient speed, for the sooner we reach the open air the better. I should advise you, however, to ascend one at a time."

"And you, captain?"

"I will follow you as soon as you are above in safety."

"Nay—nay. You go first. We will follow."

"Not so. You go first. Do not waste time about this. Ascend."

The highwaymen no longer hesitated, but they took good care to follow their captain's excellent advice.

Claude Duval was the first to climb.

The two others held the rope steady for him.

Nothing could be easier than to ascend the rope by means of the horizontal pieces of wood, and Claude was very quickly at the top.

Tom King and Sixteen-String Jack followed him, and reached the surface of the earth without accident.

They now looked down rather anxiously for the captain and his fair companion to make their appearance.

While the three friends had been ascending, Dick had occupied himself in endeavouring to calm the agitation under which Maud laboured.

The poor girl was dreadfully excited, and she clung to Turpin's arm with almost frantic violence.

For the first time Dick now wondered by what means Maud was to leave the cavern.

In her present state he was certain that it would be in the greatest degree dangerous for her to attempt to ascend by the rope in the same manner as his companions had done.

Some other mode must, therefore, be devised, and this for a little while completely baffled him.

At length he hit upon an expedient which he thought would answer his purpose, provided the rope was strong enough.

At all risks, however, he resolved to attempt it, for, by lingering there, they were perhaps incurring great danger and diminishing their chances of escape.

He called out to his comrades to make sure that the rope was firm and had not given way in any place, and having received a satisfactory reply, he addressed himself to Maud.

"Cheer up, dearest; pray, cheer up. This is weak of you; indeed it is. Our greatest peril is over now, and, believe me, there is little need of apprehension. The dragoons have gone; I watched them leave the chase with my own eyes. All we have to do is to rejoin our comrades at the top, and then to decide upon what we shall do in future."

"I know all that," said Maud; "but what distresses me is the fear that, after all that you have done, I shall not be able to ascend. I feel that my strength would not do me, that I should grow giddy

"If that is all," replied Dick, "do not let that distress you a moment longer, for I have thought of a means by which we'll be able to ascend."

"Have you? How thoughtful you are! Tell me what it is, and I will try my best."

There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"Show me, then," said Maud; "for in you I have every confidence."

"I hope you have," said Dick, earnestly,

"Believe me, I have. Tell me what I am to do first?"

"Clasp your hands together, and hold them out before you."

He was immediately obeyed.

Our hero then took off his cravat, and by means of this he ingeniously tied Maud's wrists together in such a manner as to be quite firm, and yet without giving her much pain.

What this was for she could not conceive; but she asked no questions.

As soon as he had assured himself that her wrists were securely tied together, Dick led her towards the rope.

Grasping it with both hands, he said—

"Now, Maud, dearest, show your confidence. Place your arms round my neck."

There was only one way by which she could do this, and that was lifting her hands and putting them over Dick's head.

This was what he desired her to do.

"Cling firmly to me," he added, "and we shall reach the surface without trouble."

"No—no!" exclaimed Maud, when she saw what Dick intended. "It is impossible that you can ascend the rope with me hanging on your neck in this manner."

Turpin laughed.

"Have confidence," he replied; "and then you see."

At the same moment he commenced the ascent.

With her wrists tied in the manner we have described, Maud's arm formed a kind of loop round Turpin's neck.

This made her secure so far as this went but our hero, though he had spoken so lightly of this achievement, found that in reality, it was a most difficult one.

He had, every possible inducement for exertion. Clinging to the cross-pieces of wood with his hands he slowly but surely mounted, using his feet as a means to assist him.

Maud held her breath.

At every moment she expected that Dick would loose his grasp, and that they would both be precipitated to the rocky floor below.

As they ascended higher and higher, however, without meeting with any accident, she began to grow less apprehensive.

In reality the danger now was greater than it had been.

Dick found that it required the exertion of his utmost strength to preserve his balance, and to continue to raise one hand above the other.

He felt his muscles strained until they almost cracked—his fingers threatened to give way—while his heart throbbed painfully and irregularly.

Every second served to take him nearer to the surface, and it was this which encouraged him to renew his efforts.

Perspiration streamed from every pore, and occasionally his whole body would tremble like an aspen.

At last, however, the top was safely reached.

CHAPTER CCCXCIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK MAKES A PROPOSITION TO Maud TURPIN AND HIS COMRADES.

HAD not Dick Turpin's three companions been waiting on the brink of the abyss, the escape from the cavern, though so far accomplished, would never have been completed.

When his hands grasped the last cross piece of wood, our hero felt that, if the rope had been one foot longer, he should not have been able to ascend it.

To have even now fairly reached the ground would have been impossible, had it not been for the assistance his comrades rendered him.

Bending over, they took hold of Maud by one arm, and fairly lifted her up.

She hung a dead weight upon their hands, and almost immediately they discovered that she had fainted.



[DICK TURPIN AND HIS COMPANIONS BIDDING ADIEU TO ENFIELD CHASE.]

Accordingly they laid her down upon the turf, and turned the whole of their attention to their captain, who, in truth, required all the assistance they were able to render him.

When he had been relieved of the weight of Maud in the manner we have described, he felt most thankful, for he feared that he should not have been able to retain his hold a moment longer.

Now, however, it was comparatively an easy matter; though, when he tried to reach the ground, he found his strength insufficient for the performance of such a feat.

It was while he was exhausting himself with making fresh efforts that his comrades arrived.

To seize him by both arms, and drag him over the brink, was the work of less than a moment.

At first he could do nothing; but, summoning the whole of his strength, he rose to a half-sitting posture, and inquired eagerly after Maud.

Tom King assured him of her safety, adding, at the same time, that she was insensible.

The violent exertion which Dick Turpin had just gone through was really quite enough to exhaust anyone, but he was not long in recovering himself.

He was anxious about Maud, and he immediately made his way to where she was lying upon the ground. She was now giving unequivocal signs of recovering her senses.

Almost as soon as he bent over her she opened her eyes. Her glance fell in a moment upon his countenance, and then she uttered a faint sigh of joy and satisfaction, for she knew that he was safe.

That was her first thought, and that was her sole anxiety.

At Dick's request, she did not attempt to move for a few minutes, until she felt herself strong enough to be able to do so.

Sixteen-String Jack had a flask containing a very small quantity of brandy.

This he handed to the captain, who partook of it eagerly.

it was wonderful to see what a difference the stimulant made to him.

He next assisted Maud to her feet, and then all five of them stood together in a huddled-up group.

The moon still continued to shine with great force and power, though she had some time passed the meridian.

What our friends now had to do was to seek some temporary place of shelter, and then decide upon what should next be done.

At a word, then, from their captain, the three highwaymen left the open space upon which they had been standing, and concealed themselves among the trees and underwood which grew at a short distance.

Close to where they halted the trunk of a huge tree lay upon the ground.

It seemed as though it had been struck down by lightning, and had evidently remained for a long period in its present position.

Upon this they sat down, and, amid the deep silence and solitude of nature, prepared to consider their present position and future prospects.

It was well that our friends were so light-hearted as they were, or they would have shrunk dismayed from the view before them.

They waited in silence for Turpia to speak, although, during his absence, they had talked the whole matter over, and come to their own conclusions.

Dick understood their silence.

"You are waiting for me to speak," he said, "and to advise what had best be done. I cannot take upon myself to do this, though I have given the subject much reflection."

"So have we," replied his comrades.

"Then, I doubt not," rejoined Turpia, "that we shall be able to come to a decision. In point of fact, what we have to make up our minds about, is this. Shall we remain in the chase, and risk another attack being made upon us, or shall we take our departure?"

"That is exactly it, captain," said Tom King; "we have those two alternatives, and we must choose one of them. Which will suit us best, is a matter for deliberation."

"Right!" replied Turpia; "there is much to be said in favour of both modes of action. We must weigh the subject thoroughly in our minds, consider it under all its aspects, and then determine."

"I was in hopes," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that the chase would have afforded us an asylum for a long while, or, at any rate, until the violence of the pursuit after us had abated."

"That hope is at an end now, however," replied Claude Duval; "Our presence here is not only suspected, but known."

"True," said Dick; "but our foes, as yet, have failed to discover us, and I watched them leave the chase early in the evening."

"But that," remarked Tom King, "may only be a ruse upon the part of our enemies, so as to lull us into a sense of false security, while, in the meantime, they take such measures as will make our escape from the chase a matter of impossibility."

"I fear that is but too reasonable a supposition," said Dick Turpia; "and yet, they may have withdrawn from the chase solely in the expectation that we should leave it, and perhaps a large force is assembled on the border waiting for us to make our appearance, and in readiness to pounce upon us."

"That is a supposition," said Sixteen-String Jack, "that, to my fancy, is quite as probable as the one put forth by Tom King."

"Just so," said Dick Turpia; "and it is this which makes decision such a difficult matter, for, of course, all will depend upon which we do."

"Decidedly!" said his comrades, as with one voice.

But for a short time we will leave them in this state of doubt and perplexity—remaining idle when they ought to be active—and consulting earnestly as to what should be done, while we turn our attention to the proceedings of the dragoons, and enlighten the reader with respect to their movements, about which, no doubt, a great amount of interest is felt.

We will briefly record their proceedings from the moment when we left them seated round the fire in the cavern.

Throughout the five-long night did they keep guard,

listening attentively to all sounds; but they learned nothing respecting the highwaymen.

Two surgeons arrived within a short time after they had been sent for, and when the wounds of the dragoons had been attended to, the captain discovered that his own arm was very painful, and he applied to have it dressed.

This was done at once; and when the surgeon made an examination of it, it was discovered that a bullet had passed completely through the fleshy part of his arm.

After it was dressed, the captain experienced a great deal of pain from it, and this added not a little to the ill-humour which he felt consequent upon the unsuccessful result of his expedition.

In a wearying, tedious manner the night passed away; and at length, to the infinite satisfaction of the unwounded dragoons, day broke.

They requested the captain to allow them to make a search in the chase for the four highwaymen, and strive to obtain some clue to their whereabouts.

To this request he consented, though he did not for a moment think it would be productive of any important results.

With a portion of what took place on this occasion, the reader has already been made acquainted.

We have described how the dragoons, in the course of their search, came to the orifice in the roof of the cavern, in which our friends were imprisoned and concealed.

We have related, too, how they rolled the fragment of rock down, after having done which, they listened.

But as no sound whatever came from below, they not unnaturally came to the conclusion that there was no one there, and took their departure.

For some hours longer they continued their search in the chase, but there can be no interest in describing it, because they had all their trouble for nothing, and achieved no result whatever.

Thoroughly tired out, they returned to the cavern, and acquainted their captain with the failure of their expedition.

As this was just what he anticipated, he did not feel in the least disappointed.

A consultation now took place as to what they should do, and one of the surgeons, a shrewd Scotchman, joined in the conversation.

He was especially ready with his advice, and one of his suggestions was by all present deemed such a good one that they resolved to act upon it without delay.

His proposal was this.

They were one and all to leave the chase—really leave it, and not pretend to do so—taking care to proceed with great deliberation, and not to attempt the least concealment.

He argued from this that the highwaymen, seeing them depart, would depart also.

They would then be in readiness to pursue them, and when they had once started their game, the other detachments would join in the pursuit, so that capture would in the end be certain.

From this it will be seen that the highwaymen were in very great jeopardy indeed, and their danger was in reality much greater than they fancied it to be.

The dragoons had only to be patient, and, sooner or later, they would accomplish their object, for it was subsequently determined that, should many hours elapse without the highwaymen making their appearance according to expectation, they were to re-enter the chase and thoroughly search it in every part.

Owing to the circumstances which have already been related to the reader, the specified time passed by without anything being seen, and the captain, whose impatience was now wrought up to the highest pitch, ordered his men to march, and once more entered the chase.

All was profoundly still, however, with the exception of the noise which they themselves made in their progress.

No trace of their prey could be seen, but, undaunted, they pressed onward with the firm determination of searching every bush until they had unkenelled them.

They had evidence that the cavern had been frequented by the highwaymen, because they had been seen to enter it, and because they had, to their knowledge, so mysteriously disappeared from it; so, naturally enough, they made their way back to this place.

They were careful to make no more noise in their pro-

gress than they could possibly avoid, and for this purpose all dismounted from their steeds, and left them in charge of one of their companions.

A foot, then, they stole through the leafy glades of the forest, animated by the hope that they should at length be able to steal unawares upon the highwaymen.

From what has just been narrated, it will be seen that our friends were both right with respect to the interpretation which they put upon the dragoons leaving the chase.

To them we will now return.

Little did they think, as they sat there conversing, that their enemies were stealing so stealthily upon them.

Little did they dream that they were threatened with a danger of so imminent a description.

"I am afraid," said Turpin, in reply to his comrade's observation, "that the probabilities of both are so evenly balanced, that, without some more definite information than we at present possess, or are likely to obtain, it will be impossible for us to come to a decision. It is, I think, quite certain that, now that our presence here is known, it will never do to remain; if we do, we are sure to be captured. As we must leave, then, let us do so at once."

"But the roads," said Tom King; "you must not forget that all the roads are nightly patrolled by detachments of dragoons, and it is scarcely possible that we shall be able to escape being seen by some of them."

"That is a danger," replied Turpin, "which, however great it may be at present, will certainly never grow less; therefore the sooner we leave it the better chance we should have."

"So I think," said Sixteen-String Jack, "and, if you will listen to me for a moment, I will tell you what I think had better be done under the circumstances."

"Speak—speak!" said Dick Turpin, "let us hear what you have to propose, by all means."

"I can say it, then, in a very few words, but I think it will be best to lead you on by degrees."

"Just as you like."

"Very well, then. In the first place, I think you will admit that it is well known to our foes that we are all four together."

"Certainly."

"Consequently, then, the dragoons will look out for a party of four, and you may depend that no such party would pass them without examination."

"Well—well."

"I agreed with the captain that the difficulties in the way of leaving the chase will never be less than they are at present. We must leave it at some time or other—and why not now?"

"That is just my opinion," said Dick Turpin.

"And mine—and mine," said Tom King and Claude Duval.

"Then it seems we are all of one opinion with respect to the advisability of leaving this place without delay."

"We are—we are."

"Then I have something else to propose, which will, I hope, meet with your full approbation."

"Go on—go on."

"It is this. You have admitted that the dragoons, who are on the look out for us, will expect to see us all four together."

"Yes."

"Then I propose that we should separate."

"Separate?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"I thought we had agreed to keep together," said Tom King.

"So we had, and the principal reason for our doing so was because we thought it would be conducive to our common safety. Now, however, I think that our safety would be best secured by our separating."

There was a few moments' silence after Sixteen-String Jack pronounced these words, but at length Dick Turpin said—

"I had not thought of this, but now that you mention it, I am almost inclined to think it would be best. In what manner do you propose the separation must take place?"

"I do not quite understand you."

"Do you mean that we should separate into four parties of two?"

"Oh, two, most certainly."

"You and Claude, I suppose; and Tom King and myself."

"That was what I thought, captain."

"Well, I have nothing to urge against such an arrangement."

"Nor I," said Tom King.

"I entirely agree with Jack," said Claude Duval.

"But," added Turpin, "I cannot think that this separation, which is brought about solely with the view of promoting our personal safety, is intended to be permanent."

"By no means!" said Sixteen-String Jack, warmly, "by no means. You wrong me by entertaining such a thought."

"Enough—enough!" replied Turpin. "It now remains for us to decide upon some place at which we are to meet at a certain time."

"Just so."

"Where, then, shall this place be?"

"Wherever you like."

"Nay, mention some place which, in your judgment, is least likely to be suspected by our enemies."

"Do you know Finchley?"

"Certainly."

"Do you know where the road divides, one portion leading to London by way of Highgate, and the other by way of Hampstead?"

"Yes—yes, quite well."

"Then you must have noticed that there is a triangular piece of land overgrown with grass where these roads separate."

"There is—there is."

"Let that, then, be our meeting place."

CHAPTER CCCC.

OUR FRIENDS BID ADIEU TO ENFIELD CHASE.

"AGREED," exclaimed the three companions of Sixteen-String Jack, speaking as with one voice. "Agreed."

"I am glad that you approve of my suggestion," he said.

"I do," replied Turpin. "I highly approve of it. I know the spot you mention well, and a more lonely and unfrequented one could not, I think, be found within twenty miles of London."

"Ever since a most horrible murder was committed there some fifteen years ago, the neighbourhood has been shunned by every one," said Sixteen-String Jack; "and, knowing this, prompted me to name it as our place of rendezvous."

"Nothing could suit us better."

"It is, then, determined that we shall meet there?"

"Yes."

"But when?"

"On the third night from this."

"That will do. By that time we shall certainly be able to repair to the appointed spot, and, when we meet, then it will be time enough to decide upon some future plan of operations."

"Just so."

"Are you all quite agreed as to what is to be done?" asked Turpin. "It is time we decided, for the night is waning."

"Yes, we are all agreed; and we think the sooner we leave Enfield Chase the better, at any rate for the present."

"So I think. We cannot lessen our danger by doing so; and, if we remain, I am afraid we shall increase it."

"So am I," remarked Tom King. "Do not say a word about remaining, I beg."

"There is no need to do so. The first thing necessary to be done will be to secure our horses."

"Yes, I have been thinking about that," said Claude Duval, "and I am sadly afraid that will give us a great deal of trouble."

"The dragoons may have disturbed them, perhaps," said Turpin; "but they did not capture and lead them away, I am quite sure of that."

"But how shall we capture them?"

"I think it will be done with greater ease than you imagine. The cattle are almost sure to keep together, and I have a particular whistle, by means of which I summon Black Bess."

"And will she obey it?"

"Beyond all doubt. You will find that, when I give

attention to the signal, she will neigh, and make that whinnying noise that horses always do when they are released, and then she will make her way towards me."

"But the other horses, captain; what about them?"

"I am of opinion that they will follow Black Bess."

"Well, perhaps they may; and it is to be hoped that they will do so."

"At any rate, we can but try. Should they arrive, all will be well; if not, we must adopt some other means."

"Do you think," asked Sixteen-String Jack, "that Black Bess will make her way to this spot if you give the signal here?"

"Assuredly, if she is within hearing."

"Then I think Claude and myself had better make our way to the little recess just within the entrance of the passage, where, as you well know, the saddles and bridles were deposited."

"True," said Turpin. "I had forgotten that. I am afraid, however, that our trappings have fallen into the hands of our foes, and if so, we shall be very awkwardly situated indeed."

"I scarcely apprehend anything on this score, for the place where they are deposited is dark, and little liable to discovery."

"Away, then," said Turpin, "and make use of all possible expedition; in the meantime, I will give the signal to Black Bess."

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack now rose from the trunk of the tree and hastened in the direction of the cavern, while our hero uttered that shrill chirping whistle which we have so frequently described.

In the intense silence of the forest it sounded with surprising distinctness, and echoed far and wide through the leafy recesses of the chase.

But the sound died away into nothing without creating any response, though Dick listened eagerly and intently for Black Bess's answering neigh.

As the silence continued, he resolved to try again, and, should he be unsuccessful, to remove to another spot and try the effect there.

Once more, then, he whistled, and this time with much greater loudness than before.

The result was all that he could expect.

Before the echoes had died away, the sound he had so much wished to hear came upon their listening ears.

It was the short, sharp neigh of which Dick had spoken, and, in a moment afterwards, the crashing of branches, as the bonny mare bounded towards her master, made itself heard.

Again and again did Dick repeat the signal so as to encourage the noble animal, and enable her to reach the spot upon which her master stood.

The sounds she made in her progress sufficiently indicated the direction in which she was coming, and Dick Turpin, together with Maud and Tom King, eagerly turned towards it.

Their patience was not put to a very severe trial.

In another moment the bushes before them were rudely trampled down, and Black Bess appeared.

At first she stood motionless, but as soon as Dick repeated the signal she bounded to his side.

Our hero patted and stroked his magnificent steed, to whom he was so deeply indebted.

He was delighted to once more behold her, and the gallant creature seemed to be herself no less delighted, for she rubbed her head against his breast as playfully as a dog.

Dick was roused from caressing her by hearing Tom King speak.

"You are right, captain," he said. "Here are the other horses. They look frightened, but we shall doubtless be able to capture them."

Looking up as his old comrade spoke, Dick saw that the other three horses were standing at a little distance with their faces turned towards them.

By their attitude and appearance he could tell that the least thing would send them off at a gallop.

It would, therefore, be necessary to use the utmost caution in approaching them.

Taking Black Bess by the forelock, our hero led her towards the three other horses, who now seemed to suffer much less apprehension.

Tom King followed closely behind Turpin. In this manner, and by speaking coaxingly every few

moments, they succeeded in getting close up to the animals, and, at last, patted them.

After this, all was easy.

About Black Bess Dick Turpin knew he had no occasion to trouble himself; he therefore released the hold which he had previously retained upon her, and grasped the two others, while Tom King secured the remaining one.

Scarcely had they done this, than Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, laden with the trappings belonging to the four steeds, came running towards them.

At a glance they could tell, not only by the expression of their countenances, but by their very air and manner, that something of an unusual and exciting character had taken place.

At full speed they came to where Dick Turpin was standing, and then, flinging down the heavy articles with which they had been encumbered, they strove to speak, but they were so breathless with the exertion they had recently undergone that for a few seconds they were quite unable to articulate a word.

At length, in a gasping sort of voice, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"Quick! quick! For your lives, be quick! Saddle the horses instantly! Mount, and be off with all the speed you can make! Quick! quick! I say, Saddle the horses!"

"What is the meaning of all this?" asked Dick Turpin, to whose arm Maud was again clinging, dreading, yet hoping to hear the news.

"There is no time for explanation," said Sixteen-String Jack. "On with the saddles and bridles! Quick! I say! I will tell you more presently. But, believe me, there is now no time to lose."

Urged by the energetic manner in which he spoke, as well as by his example, Dick Turpin and Tom King hastened to accoutre their steeds.

Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack occupied themselves in a similar manner, and with that rapidity which long practice had given them, they saddled and bridled their steeds.

In answer to Dick's repeated inquiries, Sixteen-String Jack said—

"We gained the cavern in safety, and found the trappings just where he had deposited them. Taking them up, we were about to return, when our attention was attracted by a slight sound. What it meant, we knew not, but deemed it important to ascertain."

"Creeping through the brushwood cautiously, we discovered that a troop of dragons were making their way towards the cavern which they had just left. More than this we did not wait to see, but hastened hither, as you have seen."

This was, indeed, alarming intelligence, and Dick Turpin and Tom King no longer wondered at the alarm which their comrades had manifested.

By the time, however, that these explanations had taken place, the horses were saddled and ready for immediate use.

With activity they sprang into their saddles, and prepared to start.

Turpin had no other means of conveying Maud at present than he had formerly made use of—namely, to place her in the saddle before him.

This he at once did, though he determined at the first opportunity that occurred to find her some more comfortable mode of conveyance, and one not so likely to attract attention.

While he carried her thus, everyone they passed could not fail to notice it as being something unusual and peculiar.

To attract attention was what he least desired; but there was no help for it in this instance, as there was no other manner in which Maud could be carried.

No time was lost in making a start after they were once in readiness to do so, and these reflections occurred to Dick as he forced his way through the undergrowth.

There was another circumstance, too, in connection with carrying Maud in this manner.

With a double burden it was not likely that Black Bess could put forth that marvellous degree of speed for which she was so celebrated; and it seemed more than probable, on the present occasion, that there would be the greatest and most pressing need for her utmost powers to be tried.

Already their foes were close behind them.

To be sure, at present, they had made no manifestation of their presence, but our friends could not tell how suddenly or unexpectedly this might happen.

They hoped, however, to be able to emerge from the chase with due caution and deliberation, and not be compelled to fly from it for their lives.

In the one case, they would have, at least, a chance of avoiding any of their foes, who might be stationed round the chase to watch for their appearance, but in the other, detection would be inevitable.

On their way towards the borders of the forest, Sixteen-String Jack and Claude Duval both declared that the dragons, whose approach to the cavern had so much alarmed them, had not heard them, and had no suspicion of them, but they could not tell whether or how soon they might be followed.

This intelligence was much more cheering and hopeful than our hero had hoped to receive; still, he clung more than ever to his original idea, that the sooner they left the chase the better it would be for them.

His companions had fallen back and allowed him to lead the way, so he directed his steps in as straight a line as he could to the outskirts of the forest.

After proceeding in this manner for some distance without hearing anything of their enemies in the rear, they were warned by the rapidly-increasing thinness of the vegetation that they were close to the open country with which Enfield Chase was surrounded.

Dick now came to a halt, and his companions did the same.

"We had better part here," Turpin said, "since we have agreed upon the separation taking place. It will be better to emerge by twos than all four together."

"Certainly!" said Claude and Jack.

"There is no need for any delay over the ceremony of parting, and we have no time to spare. You understand the place at which the meeting is to take place?"

"Yes; do not forget, captain—the triangular piece of ground, the junction of the two roads near Finchley."

"Depend upon me," replied Dick. "I know the spot well; and on the third night from this I will most surely be there."

"At what hour?"

"It is impossible to say what hour, for we cannot tell what may occur. Let it be some time between midnight and daybreak."

"Agreed!"

"One word more, ere we part."

"What is it, captain?"

"It will be necessary for the sake of your own safety that you use the utmost caution and circumspection in your progress. Remember, the roads all round London, as we have been informed, are nightly patrolled by detachments of dragons, whose sole duty it is to endeavour to capture us. You will, I fear, have much trouble in eluding them."

"Rely upon our being cautious to a degree, captain."

"I will do so. The only chance you have of escaping them, I think, is this. I shall adopt it myself."

"What is it, captain?"

"To avoid the main roads altogether, and travel only through narrow and unfrequented lanes."

"A good thought. As you say, we cannot do better; and you may depend that in this, if in nothing else, we shall follow your example."

"I am glad you have resolved to do so, because it will have the effect of removing a great deal of uneasiness from my mind."

"We shall try our best to elude our foes, you may depend. It is not the first time we have had to run the gauntlet, and, for my own part, I feel little apprehension."

It was Claude Duval who spoke.

"Let us part, then," said Dick Turpin. "We have already lingered here too long. Yet, ere we say farewell, look back for the last time upon the shelter we are about to leave. I thought old Enfield Chase would have proved a place of refuge for us for a much longer period than it has, but that hope is over. Our sojourn there, though brief, has been a very happy one. Our foes have forced us to quit it. Farewell!"

As he spoke these words, his comrades looked back upon the scene they were about leaving, probably for ever.

They could not but regret their departure from this place under such circumstances.

They had hoped that in future times it would have been a place to which they could have repaired, and hidden themselves from their enemies.

Now that hope was entirely over.

Not only had their retreat been discovered, but even the secret of the cavern, which they had hoped to preserve to themselves, was now a secret no longer.

After this one long glance at their greenwood home, the highwaymen turned round.

There was no emotion visible in the countenances of each of them.

It was caused by their leaving the forest and the cavern.

Barely was it that they were permitted to remain so long in one place as they had been in this, and already they had begun to look upon it with those feelings with which everyone regards home, and they felt leaving it with a keenness which none save those in their position can comprehend.

"Farewell!" said Dick, again; and, as he spoke, he extended his hand.

It was in succession warmly grasped by Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, who repeated the word of valediction.

They also shook Tom King warmly by the hand, and bade adieu to Maud.

"Now," said Turpin, "forward! You shall go first, and we will follow."

"Right, captain. Farewell! Remember the third night from this on the Finchley-road, some time between midnight and daybreak."

"I will be there," said Turpin, "if I am in life. Fear nothing upon that head."

"Once more, then, farewell!" exclaimed Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack; and, as they spoke, they urged their horses forward.

Again and again did Dick Turpin repeat the word "Farewell!" until their comrades had fairly vanished from view.

For a moment or two all three were silent and motionless.

An uncomfortable feeling of foreboding came over them as soon as Claude and Jack had disappeared, and it was in vain they tried to shake off the depression under which they laboured.

Dick Turpin was, however, the first to recollect himself and the peril in which they stood.

CHAPTER CCCC.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE ATTACKED AND PURSUED BY THE DRAGONS, AND MAUD HAS A NARROW ESCAPE OF HER LIFE.

"We are forgetting that our enemies are so close behind us," he said. "Now, Tom, do not let us linger any longer. Our two comrades have gone, and let us follow their example. We will, however, endeavour to emerge at another spot."

"It will be most prudent to do so."

"I am of that opinion."

As he uttered these words, Dick Turpin set his steed in motion.

Now that the trees grew at a greater distance from each other, and the undergrowth was not so dense, it was perfectly easy for Tom King to ride abreast with Turpin, and he accordingly did so.

Instead of going in a straight direction, which would in a few moments have led them clear of the Chase, they crept round the borders, intending to emerge at some point at a considerable distance from that where they had parted with Claude and Jack.

Scarcely, however, had they proceeded fifty paces, than they were startled by a sudden blast upon a bugle.

It came from somewhere very close at hand, and struck upon their ears with so much suddenness that it for a moment deprived our friends of sense and motion, accustomed as they were to sudden surprises of all descriptions.

The horses, too, reared slightly, for even they were alarmed by the startling abruptness of the sound.

Ere the two highwaymen could recover from their astonishment, a sudden crackling and crashing of the bushes made itself heard, and then immediately there appeared before them a man, who, at a glance, they saw by his uniform, to be a member of the troop of dragons

He held in his hand one of those short-barrelled carbines which they carry; and placing this in a moment to his shoulder, he said—

"Surrender! you are my prisoners! Surrender, or I fire!"

These last words were almost drowned by a tremendous uproar in the distance.

Our friends now understood all.

Indeed, there was no difficulty in coming to a correct conclusion upon the matter.

The troop of dragoons, which Claude and Jack had seen approaching along the cavern, had dispersed themselves over the chase.

Each one had been furnished with a bugle, with instructions to blow a loud blast upon it the moment they caught sight of the highwaymen.

The effect of this bugle blast would be to cease the whole of the little troop to make their way, with all speed, in the direction from which the sound came.

The dragoon who so boldly and daringly called upon our friends to surrender had suddenly caught sight of the two horsemen, who he knew to be those he sought, from the description which had been given him.

True to his commands, this dragoon placed the bugle to his lips, and blew the shrill blast upon it in the manner we have recorded; then, eager to earn as much of the reward as he could, he sprang through the bushes, with his carbine in his hand ready for immediate use.

That he was a brave man his conduct is quite enough to prove.

Raising his weapon to his shoulder, and covering those he addressed with it, he called upon them to surrender.

All this took place with so much rapidity that Dick Turpin and Tom King, who, under the first impulse of the moment, had reined in their steeds, had not had time to set them in motion again.

The remainder of the detachment of dragoons was very close at hand, and directly they heard the sound of the bugle, they rushed towards the spot from which the sound appeared to come.

It was their approach which caused the uproar that had followed so close upon the command of the dragoon to our friends to surrender.

Truly, they were now in a serious dilemma, and it is not to be wondered at if for a moment they hesitated as to what they should do.

To be driven out of the chase with a party of dragoons at their heels, was what they most wished to avoid, for it made their discovery almost certain.

Yet, to remain where they were, was quite out of the question.

They saw at once that an encounter with the dragoons could not but be most disastrous to them, and that there would be no hope of their being able to fight it out and remain the victors.

The real fact was, that our friends, skilful and courageous as they were, would not have stood the ghost of a chance with a body of men so well drilled in the use of the weapons they carried as these soldiers were.

They had, therefore, but one resource, and that was to fly.

There was a risk in doing this, for the dragoon pointed his weapon at them with a correct aim, and that he would fire the instant they attempted to move was quite certain.

Still this danger, great as it was, must be braved.

Ere another second could elapse, the greater portion of the troop would be upon them, for already they could perceive the glitter of their accoutrements as they forced their way through the underwood.

Loud shouts and cries, too, came from their lips.

It was for Maud that Dick felt most apprehension.

He was terribly afraid that she would be wounded.

By her manner, and the way she trembled, he could tell how great was the alarm she felt.

It was to Tom King's rapidity of motion that her safety may be attributed.

Suddenly drawing a loaded pistol from his belt, he fired it full in the face of the dragoon with the carbine, who was taken by surprise.

But his finger was on the trigger, and he fired.

But Tom's shot caused him to lose his aim, and the bullet with which the piece was loaded flew high above their heads.

"Forward," he cried to Dick Turpin, his voice mingling strangely with the report of the discharged firearm. "Forward—forward. Use your best speed, and we may yet escape."

While he spoke, he struck his spurs deeply into his horse's sides, while Dick Turpin just pressed with his heels upon the flanks of his bonny mare.

That was enough.

She bounded forward at a gallop that was truly marvellous to witness, and before the dragoon could recover from the shock, and before his comrades could arrive upon the scene, the prey, which at last they made sure was in their grip, had quite got out of sight.

At this their anger knew no bounds.

It so happened that all the dragoons were on foot, for they had found it impossible to conduct their search on horseback, and had, therefore, dismounted.

Nearly all of them had been close enough to see the highwaymen gallop off at the tremendous rate they did, and, consequently, were well aware that to attempt to pursue them on foot was worse than useless.

Nevertheless several ran in the direction they had taken, and had the satisfaction—or rather dissatisfaction—of seeing them at a considerable distance pushing across the open country surrounding the chase with all the speed they were able to make.

These, having once caught sight of our flying friends, did not remove their gaze, but closely watched the direction which they took, so as to be able to follow them with greater certainty.

This was a very useful precaution.

In the meantime, the captain, with a ready thoughtfulness, for which he deserves due credit, commanded the man next to him to blow three blasts upon the bugle.

This signal was intended for the men who had charge of the horses, and they had been previously instructed to make their way to whence the sounds came without loss of time.

The clear, sharp notes of the bugle rang out with great effect on the clear night air, and made themselves heard over a large tract of country.

Even our friends heard it in their wild flight, and much wondered what it meant.

The musical sounds reached, too, the ears for which they were intended, and were obeyed with that promptitude which characterizes the soldiery.

A serious delay, however, took place in bringing the horses to the required spot, although not a second was lost.

As soon as they arrived, however, the captain, commanding his men to vault into the saddle, showed them the example by doing so, and was mounted first.

He then called out to them to follow him, and, with the same reckless impetuosity, dashed forward before he had time to see whether he was obeyed.

Considering the difficulties they had to contend with, the dragoons were fairly mounted, and in full pursuit, in an incredibly short space of time.

Some minutes had, however, necessarily elapsed, and to our friends these few minutes were everything.

They enabled them to get such a start of their pursuers as made their chances of escape much greater.

When the captain rode out of the chase they had entirely disappeared, and though the country was lighted up with extreme brilliancy for many miles by the slant rays of the moon, yet he was unable to even catch a glimpse of them.

Nor was there any sound to indicate their locality.

The only chance they had laid in the fact of several of the dragoons having watched our friends out of sight, so they were able, at any rate, to get upon the right track.

The horses of the dragoons, thoroughly rested and refreshed, were in excellent condition for the road, and their riders taxed their powers to the utmost.

A way, then, they flew, as though upon "the wings of the wind," and the rate at which they sped over the ground seemed, at least, to promise them a chance of overtaking the fugitives.

Whether or not they were destined to do this will very shortly be seen.

It is, however, we fancy, in the pursued that the greatest interest is felt, and not in the pursuers.

Leaving, then, the dragoons to push on with all speed after the highwaymen, we will describe what happened to them.

Owing to the pistol which Tom King had so judiciously fired, the dragoon had been baffled and his aim confused.

Consequently, although he fired, yet the bullet with which his piece was loaded did not the least injury to either Dick Turpin, Maud, or Tom King.

How they then darted off, has already been told.

The two highwaymen had been pursued too many times in their lives not to know the importance of making all they could of the short time that would elapse before their foes would be in a condition to follow them.

In a chase of this description a good start would be everything, and, if they should only be lucky enough to obtain it, they did not doubt, should nothing disastrous occur, that eventually they would be able to shake them off altogether.

Our two old friends did not say a word to each other; the rate at which they were travelling entirely precluded conversation, but there was no necessity for speech, they perfectly understood what was to be done.

Urging their horses to the utmost, they flew over the country at a speed which entirely took away their breath and carried them out of sight of their enemies.

They did not take to the road, but kept in a straight line across the face of the country.

For the most part they had to traverse meadow lands, and the only obstructions to their headlong course were such as hedges and ditches.

Over these they forced their flying steeds to leap.

From time to time they cast anxious glances back in the direction of the chase, but they could see nothing of the dragoons, who were, as we have related, waiting for their horses to be brought to them.

This cheered their spirits, and encouraged them to make fresh exertions, for could they once get clear out of sight, they felt sure they would escape.

It was a circumstance which rather struck them with surprise that they had encountered none of the other troops of dragoons, of whose existence the spy had informed them, and with whom they fully expected to come into contact.

It might be that the reason of this was that they had not taken to the high road anywhere, but had kept clear across the meadows.

This conjecture was partially correct, but there was another reason with which the reader will presently be made acquainted.

It is certain that the flying highwaymen felt much pleasure in consequence.

Suddenly, however, they came in sight of a narrow, cross-country lane, and immediately drew in their steeds.

They were separated from it by a low hedge only, and over this they leaped.

When they alighted in the road they remained for a moment or two immovable, for the double purpose of allowing their steeds to recover, to some extent, from the tremendous exertions which they had made, and to allow Dick and Tom an opportunity of looking back and ascertaining whether their pursuers were on their track.

But though they looked with keen and practised eyes in the direction of the chase, they were unable to see anything of them.

Rejoiced at this circumstance, the two highwaymen ventured to address a few words of encouragement and hope to each other.

Dick Turpin cheered Maud as well as he was able.

The poor girl was in a terrible state of alarm, but events had lately taken place with so much rapidity that she was scarcely able to realize the full extent of her danger.

She was unhurt, and our hero felt no small amount of joy upon being made acquainted with this important fact.

She was breathless, however, not with terror alone, but with the rapidity with which she had been carried along.

"Our foes have no horses ready," said Tom King; "you may depend that is the reason we have been able to get so far in advance of them."

"It may be," replied Turpin; "but we must not trust to that."

"Certainly not."

"I think, now that we have arrived at this cross-country road unperceived, that the best thing we can do is to keep along it at tolerable speed, but not so as to exhaust our horses quickly."

"That is precisely my opinion, Dick," said Tom King. "We shall be able to turn, and wind and double upon our course in such a manner that our pursuers will be fairly puzzled if they attempt to follow us."

"We will try if we cannot bring about such a desirable result; and by confining ourselves entirely to these narrow lanes, and not venturing out upon the high roads at all, I think we shall be able to avoid coming into collision with the other troops that may be patrolling the roads."

"Just so. I think there can be no doubt about that."

"Forward, then. We ought to be moving, and our horses by this time have rested long enough to recover their spent wind."

Dick Turpin gave Black Bess the reins as he spoke, and the noble animal immediately set off at an easy gallop, but which, nevertheless, got over a large piece of ground in a surprisingly short space of time.

It was a pace, too, which Tom King was able to keep up with.

The lane wound about as country lanes nearly always do, and scarcely any time could they see twenty yards before them.

This it was not likely they would find fault with, because it gave them a better opportunity of keeping out of sight of their pursuers.

Unfortunately for them, however, the hedges on both sides were not high enough to conceal them from the view of any persons who might be in the meadows.

This they could not remedy, so, very wisely, they made the best they could of their position.

They now perceived, though, that the moon was rapidly declining towards the western horizon, and they knew by this that dawn was not far distant.

This was an inducement for them to increase their speed, for, from the mere fact of his having Maud upon the saddle before him, it made Dick desirous of reaching some place of shelter and safety before daylight fairly came.

CHAPTER CCCCII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ARE LULLED INTO A SENSE OF FALSE SECURITY.

It was quite certain that the attention of anyone who passed them would be at once attracted by so unusual a circumstance.

Curiosity would be roused—the whole affair would be commented on, and, as a natural consequence, the dragoons would have little or no difficulty in tracing them.

This consideration, then, which he communicated to his companion, induced Dick to accelerate his speed.

At that early hour of the morning—an hour at most before sunrise—it was scarcely likely they would meet with any persons in these lonely lanes; but as soon as the sun rose it would be a different matter, for rural inhabitants are usually early abroad.

All around them the country was monotonously level, but with this they were well enough pleased, for it enabled them to get over the ground in much less time, for they had no steep hills to climb.

Lower and lower sunk the moon, until at length she disappeared beneath the western horizon, and still our friends continued their way.

There was nothing to be seen of their enemies, and if they were in the rear they were at so great a distance as to be completely out of sight.

This was encouraging to our friends, whose hopes of ultimately being able to elude their foes increased every moment.

Day dawned.

A faint, cold, misty sort of light crept by slow degrees over the whole country.

Gradually, distant objects were brought to view; and when at length day fully came, our friends reined in their steeds, and Tom King, standing in his stirrups, looked long and eagerly in the direction they had just come.

Attentively he scanned every object, no matter how small or remote, but still he was unable to detect anything moving.

For a long time he continued thus scanning the country, and shading the extraneous light with his hands.

Still he could see nothing; and at length, with an expression of content and satisfaction upon his countenance, he once more seated himself in the saddle,

"All is well, Dick," he said. "That capital start we had did the business. We have fairly got rid of our pursuers. They are, I am convinced, no where in sight." "I am glad to hear that," said Dick. "And now I think the next thing we must see about doing, is to find some place where we can remain all day, and where our horses will be able to have proper food and rest."

"Decidedly. If we are not careful, to attend to their wants, it will be all over with us."

"You are right; our lives wholly depend upon them, and, therefore, we cannot be too careful."

"We had better jog on gently. I should think, before we proceed much further, we shall certainly be able to meet with some place where we shall be able to put up for a time."

"I hope so."

"What we want to find is some quiet, out-of-the-way road-side public house—one as far removed from other dwellings as possible, and the less frequented, the better."

"You are right; that is just the sort of place we require."

"We must look out for it. Come forward! it will be best not to linger. I expect every moment to meet with someone."

The highwaymen urged their horses to go faster, and quickly reached the termination of the lane.

It opened into a broad country road.

Upon reaching this place our friends paused to reconnoitre.

No one appeared to be in sight, however, but a little distance down this road to the left could be seen the roof and chimneys of some building.

A second glance showed them that at that portion of the road which was opposite to the dwelling a post was fixed, which carried a swinging sign.

It was about a quarter of a mile off.

The early rays of the rising sun fell upon this sign-board and revealed some gilding upon it, but what it was they were too far off to see.

"There is the very place we are looking for, it appears to me," said Tom King, as he pointed towards it; "I do not think we can do better than make our way towards it."

"I am of the same opinion," replied Turpin, "though, had I been permitted any choice in the matter, I should have preferred one in some less busy road."

"In some respects such a one might have been more desirable, but perhaps it is better as it is. I am inclined to think that we shall act wisely by taking up our quarters there."

"So am I; and the thing which influences me most is the fatigue which Black Bess so palpably exhibits. A double load is too much for her."

"It is; but what you have just said has put me in mind of something which I am sure demands our earnest attention."

"What is it?"

"If you ride up to the inn yonder with Maud still seated on the saddle before you, suspicion will be immediately aroused."

"True. I am glad you mentioned it."

"At any rate, it will be provocative of curiosity and comment, and we want to be as little noticed as possible."

"Just so."

"What means you would like to adopt to get over this difficulty, I know not. At any rate, some means must be devised."

"Unquestionably. Have you any plan?"

"No."

"I must think of one, then."

Dick Turpin relapsed into silence.

He comprehended in a moment the full force of what his comrade had said to him, and was aware of the imperative necessity of diverting all observation from them as much as possible.

"There is only one plan that I can think of by which this difficulty may be overcome," he said, at length.

"What is it?"

"I am not at all pleased with it," he replied, "and if you could devise some other, I should be glad."

"Let me hear it."

"It is this. Suppose Maud alights, and remains for a little while in the road. In the meantime, we will make our way to the inn, see to our steeds, and then sit down

in one of the rooms, saying that we expect a lady presently, and that they are to show her into the room."

"I understand," said Tom. "Maud would walk out towards the inn."

"Just so."

"It is a good plan, and one well calculated to divert suspicion."

"I think so; but, at the same time, I am very unwilling to leave Maud here in the road to walk on by herself."

"If that is the only thing you have to urge against the plan," said Maud, gently, "consider it as nothing. I am willing to do much more than that to secure your safety. Let me alight."

"Brave girl," said Dick, as he pressed her still closer to his breast. "I am most unwilling that you should incur the danger of walking to this inn."

"What danger can there be? Your enemies are far behind. I heard you say as much."

"True, but there is always danger, and I dread to allow you to be a moment out of my sight."

"It will not take many moments, and I shall scarcely be out of your sight. Let me alight. I am sure no better means could be found of averting suspicion."

This was exactly what Dick himself thought, but still he was reluctant to agree to its adoption.

At length, however, after she had renewed her entreaties, he assisted her to the ground, after giving her very particular instructions as to what she should do.

To all of them she promised implicit obedience, and a few words of parting having taken place between them, the two highwaymen started off, leaving her on foot upon the road.

A feeling of uneasiness, for which he was totally at a loss to account, filled Dick's breast upon thus leaving her behind him, and all his efforts to banish it were unavailing.

At every few yards he turned back to look where she was standing, until he was warned by Tom King of the danger of indulging in this propensity.

The reader must be pleased to understand that, what we have just described, took place near the end of the lane, and not upon the broad road into which it debouched.

The reason for this was that they were fearful of being seen by any of the inhabitants of the inn, some of whom might be at the upper windows.

As soon as they had started, however, Maud ventured to emerge into the roadway, where she stood, with clasped hands, watching their disappearance.

A similar sensation to that which filled Dick's breast weighed also upon her spirits.

She felt a strange foreboding, such as she had never before experienced.

She felt inexpressibly lonely, and, though Turpin was fully in sight, it seemed to her as though she had parted from him for ever.

So strong was this idea, that it was not without difficulty that she restrained her impulse to call out to him to return.

Ashamed of this weakness—for so she termed it—she forebore to do so.

She saw him turn round in the saddle and look after her, and she waved her hand in token of recognition.

Her eyes filled with tears as he receded more and more from her view, and a terrible dread that she should see him no more—that she was then taking her last look of him—filled her bosom.

She saw them both halt before the inn, and then enter the yard.

Upon seeing them thus utterly vanish, she burst into tears.

Her impatience and anxiety would not allow her to remain any longer where she was, and, with slow and tottering steps, she walked along the dusty road towards the inn.

Here we will leave her, and return to the two highwaymen.

It was well that Tom King had sufficient forethought to warn his comrade against continuing to look back in the manner he had done, for such a proceeding would have inevitably caused suspicion.

"It is necessary that we should be cautious to a degree," continued Tom King. "You may depend every body is on the alert."

"No doubt—no doubt."



[TOM KING CONCILIATES THE OSTLER OF THE MOUNTAIN RILL INN.]

"And that reminds me when we go to the inn, be careful to choose a sitting-room upstairs."

"Why?"

"Because, from an upper window we shall be sure to have a more extensive prospect than one on the ground-floor, and I should recommend that we keep a continual look-out for our foes, for you cannot tell how soon the dragons may get upon our track, and it will never do to be taken at unawares by such adversaries as those."

"You are quite right," said Dick Turpin, "and I am pleased to find that you have lost none of your old prudence and ability. It really seems like old times for us both to be upon the road together, and makes me long for an adventure."

"Hush!" said Tom. "We may be overheard."

As he spoke, he checked his steed, and Dick immediately did the same.

Early as was the hour—being only just after sunrise—there were ample indications that the inmates of the inn were all astir

As soon as our friends paused before the door, a stout but somewhat aged man appeared upon the threshold.

There was something in the expression of this hale old man's countenance that gave our friends quite a feeling of satisfaction to look upon.

It was beaming with health and good humour, and there was a merry twinkle visible in his clear, bright, gray eye.

His head was almost bald, and his shining pate made him seem at once venerable and agreeable.

All this our friends noted in a moment, and the next thing that struck them favourably was the scrupulous cleanness that was visible, not only in his person, but over the whole of the house.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said cheerfully and respectfully, carrying his hand to his forehead as he spoke.

"Do you want to bait here?"

"Yes, if we can do so."

"Then you can. I think, if you will give it a trial, that there is the best of accommodation, both for man and beast, at the 'Mountain Rill.'"

"That is the sign of the house, I suppose."
 "Yes; you can see it is, if you will just glance up to the sign-board, and you'll see my name underneath it—Timothy Goodridge."

"Well, Mr. Goodridge," said Turpin, "we will try the accommodation you speak of."

"Thank you, gentlemen. Would you please to wait in?"

"Not just this moment. We would prefer to see our horses safe first."

"You leave that to me," said Timothy Goodridge. "I'll call the ostler out; he will take care of them."

"Oh! never mind. That's the way to the stables, I suppose," said Dick, pointing under an archway. "We will find the ostler ourselves."

As he spoke, our hero turned his horse's head in the direction of which he had spoken, and Tom King instantly followed his example.

The landlord knew very well that it was always injudicious to oppose the inclinations of his customers, so he ran after them, calling loudly upon the ostler as he did so.

That worthy very soon made his appearance, and took hold of the horses' bridles while they alighted.

During the time he was removing their trappings, Dick took the landlord on one side.

"If you can accommodate us with a private room for the remainder of the day, and a couple of bedrooms, we should feel much obliged. Can you do so?"

"Certainly, gentlemen; certainly."

"Have you any sitting-rooms up-stairs?"

The landlord scratched his head.

"There's the best room in the front of the house on the first-floor."

"Is it engaged?"

"No."

"Then we will take it."

"As you please, gentlemen."

"And there is something else, which I shall want you to attend to at once."

"I am entirely at your service, gentlemen."

"I expect a lady to call here in a few moments. She will inquire for us. When she does so, you will be good enough to show her into the best room of the first-floor, of which you have spoken."

"Very good, gentlemen; your orders shall be obeyed. But please to come to the house. The ostler will take care of the horses."

"All right, we will follow you immediately. Do you make haste to the front door, for I cannot tell how soon the lady may arrive."

After this the landlord found it impossible to stay any longer, so he waddled off at once.

As soon as he had gone, our friends turned their attention to the ostler, whose sympathy it was in the highest degree necessary for them to elicit.

The preliminary present of a crown-piece had the effect of placing them on excellent terms with each other, and the highwaymen adroitly kept him in conversation with them while he groomed and fed the horses.

Having satisfied themselves upon this point, as well as ascertaining the position of the stable, its distance from the house, the place where the saddles and bridles were deposited, as well as the manner in which the door was fastened, they crossed the yard, all the time looking carefully about them, and entered the inn by the back door.

CHAPTER CCCIII.

THE CONDUCT OF TIMOTHY GOODRIDGE, THE LANDLORD, BECOMES SUSPICIOUS.

THAT there was nothing whatever calculated to arouse suspicion in the manner in which our two friends had arrived at the "Mountain Kill" inn, the reader must be well aware.

For two horsemen well mounted to halt as they did for refreshment, both for their beasts and for themselves, was a thing that happened frequently in those days, when the facilities for travelling which we now possess did not exist.

Neither was there anything suspicious or extraordinary in the very legitimate message they gave the landlord respecting the arrival of a lady.

All this was due to Tom King's caution, who, although

they were so near to Enfield Chase, and consequently so close to their foes, nevertheless hoped that they would be able to remain at this inn for a sufficient length of time to enable them to recuperate their strength and consult upon what was to be done in the future.

For our own part we cannot help considering their position somewhat ticklish, and by no means share the confidence which they not only exhibited but felt.

Just as though he had lived there all his life, Dick Turpin placed his thumb upon the latch of the back door, and, raising it, entered the inn.

He found himself in a large and comfortable kitchen, in which, however, there was no company, though this was easily accounted for by the fact that the sun had only just risen.

Nevertheless, a cheerful fire was burning in the grate, and the whole of the room presented that appearance of cleanliness, neatness, and order which had impressed our two friends so favourably when they first halted in front of the inn.

A mere passing glance, which they cast around them as they crossed the kitchen, showed them this.

Just before them was a partially-open door, and to this they, of course, directed their steps.

It led into the passage communicating with the front door.

Here the landlord still stood.

He was looking earnestly down the road, and shading his eyes with his hands, for the sun shone into them in a perplexing manner.

So intently occupied was he, that he did not observe our friends approach.

It was evident from this that Maud had not arrived.

For this the highwaymen were not sorry; they would have preferred to have got comfortably seated in their private room.

As they approached the front door, however, the landlord turned round.

As soon as he caught sight of them he came towards them.

"You took me at unawares, gentlemen. I thought you would have come back the other way. Pardon my not being here to receive you."

"Don't mention that, I beg; but tell me, has the lady about whom I spoke to you yet arrived?"

"She has not, sir. Will she come on foot?"

"Why do you ask that question?" said Tom King.

"No offence, sir, I hope; but I was going to say that if so, there is a lady slowly coming this way."

"That is her, then," said Turpin. "Be sure that you are at hand to receive her."

"All right, worthy sir. Would you like to go upstairs at once? It will be some minutes, no doubt, before the lady arrives."

"Yes. Who is there to show me to the apartment?"

"I will, sir."

"But I want you to stay at the front door and keep watch."

"The lady is a distance down the road, sir; and it won't take me a moment to run upstairs and show you your room."

"Very good, then; make haste!"

The landlord was almost as good as his word.

The length of time it took him to show our friends into the front room was short, indeed; and, having done, he descended the stairs with greater alacrity than anyone would have imagined possible.

Dick Turpin's first impulse, upon entering the room, was to make his way to the window.

Tom King closely followed him, and the glance which he cast into the roadway was but little less anxious than that of his captain.

There was no Maud to be seen.

What could be the meaning of this?

They had fully expected to catch sight of her approaching, and to have increased her confidence by showing her that they were in safety.

"Did not the landlord say he could see her at some distance down the road?" asked Turpin, anxiously.

"He did, Dick."

"But I can see nothing of her."

"Nor I. Yet stay. I have a thought. How foolish of us, to be sure!"

"How—what do you mean? I do not understand you."

"Why, we have been long enough talking to the landlord and getting to the window to allow Maud to have reached the door."

"Of course. I did not give the matter a thought, and expected to see her at a distance still."

"She has arrived, you may depend."

"This window does not command a view of the front door, which appears to me to be immediately below us."

"Doubtless it is."

"There will not be much risk in opening the window. Let us do so. You see it opens like a door. We should then be able to see easily enough."

"Let us do so."

Dick Turpin hastily turned the little fastening of the latticed window, and opened it carefully.

Then both looked out.

The sound of voices reached their ears, and almost instantly they saw Maud standing at the door.

The landlord was there, and appeared to be questioning her closely.

Doubtless his curiosity was aroused, and he desired to learn all he could about his customers.

There was a look of deep distress upon Maude's countenance that made Dick angry to witness.

Doubtless she was alarmed at the cross-examination to which she was being subjected.

Dick could not contain himself sufficiently to remain a spectator of this scene for a moment.

"That will do, landlord!" he called out. "That is the lady I expect; let her come up."

This action of Dick's was rather an injudicious one, but perhaps it did not matter, as there was no one in sight. He was conscious that he had acted incautiously the moment after he had spoken, and drew in his head hastily.

When the landlord looked up he had disappeared.

Maud gave vent to a faint scream of surprise as the well-known accents fell upon her ears.

Where they came from she knew not, for when she looked around Turpin was nowhere visible.

With considerable confusion perceptible both in his voice and manner, the landlord spoke.

"This way," he said, "this way. Be good enough to walk this way. The gentlemen you desire to see are in the best room upstairs."

Maud followed, of course.

The mere fact of her arrival at the door of the inn will suffice to assure the reader that she performed her walk in safety.

What, then, the forebodings portended which had so filled her breast she knew not.

Dick Turpin, after having spoken from the window in the manner we have recorded, hastened to the door of the room, and, opening it, listened for Maude's approach. He could soon hear the sounds of the landlord's voice, which, somehow or other, had grown distasteful to his ears.

He was apologizing to her for having detained her.

In another moment the couple reached the top of the stairs, and the landlord, with many bows, ushered her into the apartment.

With a low, hysterical cry of joy, Maud sprang forward. Dick caught her in his arms.

He was somewhat surprised at this exhibition of feeling. He endeavoured to soothe her.

In the meantime, Tom King, who had all his wits about him, ingeniously got rid of the gaping and curious landlord by ordering him to bring the breakfast up as quickly as possible.

After this order, Mr. Timothy Goodridge could do nothing but retire, and he reluctantly left the room.

His curiosity was strongly roused, and as yet he had not been able to elicit any information calculated to quell it.

Dick soon succeeded in soothing Maud and calming her agitation.

When she fully realized that Turpin was safe, her excitement passed away.

Our hero questioned her closely with respect to her conversation with the landlord.

It was just as he had expected.

The landlord had asked a multitude of questions, all having the same tendency; namely, to elicit from her some information respecting his two early visitors.

Maud, however, had been fully on her guard, despite the excitement under which she laboured, and Mr. Goodridge had not succeeded in exacting anything from her at the moment when Turpin put an end to the colloquy by speaking from the window above.

All was now well, and after a few more words had been exchanged, Maud retired to the bedroom to arrange her disordered dress and attend to her toilette.

Turpin and King, too, were not at all sorry to do the same thing, and when the landlord came up with a first-rate breakfast, consisting of a host of homely delicacies, all three presented a much more civilized appearance than they had done a short time previously.

That all three were blessed with a good appetite the reader need scarcely be told, and, notwithstanding the dangers which they had so recently passed through, and the no less serious ones which seemed to menace them in the future, they sat down to this tempting meal with as light hearts as any in Christendom.

Even Maud smiled, and looked as gay and happy as her two companions, though occasionally her fair face would become clouded when her thoughts were directed to the future.

By the time the breakfast was finished—washed down as it was by copious draughts of ale of excellent quality—our friends felt much inclined to be at peace with all the world, and they became oblivious of all that was suspicious and disagreeable in the landlord's character while thinking of the good fare he had placed before them.

Aware, as they all of necessity were, of the importance of sleep in recuperating the body from fatigue, and being also conscious that some length of time might possibly elapse before they would have so good an opportunity of slumbering as they had at the present time, they agreed that they should sleep, if possible, till nightfall.

For both the highwaymen to have surrendered themselves to slumber would have been dangerous to a degree, and so it was arranged that Turpin and King should take it in turns to watch.

The lot fell first upon Tom King.

Drawing the dingy curtain which hung before the window, he sat down in such a manner that though he could command a good view of the country around, yet it would have been difficult for any one on the outside to have caught sight of him, and to have distinguished his form and features would have been impossible.

Here, then, he sat, with his eyes roaming constantly over the vast expanse of flat country spread out before him, in order to ascertain at the earliest moment whether the dragoons were approaching.

His first care was to make his eye thoroughly familiar with every feature of the landscape spread out before him, so as to be the better able to detect quickly the appearance of anything unusual.

This was a wise precaution, but there really seemed no need of it, for the time wore on, and still there were no signs of the approach of the dragoons.

From this Tom began to indulge in the hope that they had really been successful enough to elude them altogether.

At length the termination of his time of watching was reached, and, punctual to a moment, Dick entered the room to relieve his friend.

A few words passed between them as to what had taken place.

Dick was well pleased to hear that Tom had not seen anything of the dragoons; and he, too, ventured to hope that for a time they were safe from their enemies.

Tom King was right glad to be relieved, though he exhibited no hurry to retire; but Turpin could see by his haggard face how much he stood in need of rest.

At his urgent solicitation, he betook himself to the bedchamber which had been provided for him, and Turpin resumed his place at the window.

With no less eagerness and keenness than his companion he scanned attentively the various features of the landscape.

But all was satisfactory.

Where the dragoons were, or how it was they had not succeeded in tracking them to their present place of refuge, he was at a loss to think.

From the window at which he sat he had a prospect of many miles, but Enfield Chase was far beyond the limits of his vision.

Still his caution did not relax, and well was it for him that it did not.

As noon approached, he suddenly perceived in the far distance something which glittered brightly in the sun.

Instantly his eyes were fixed upon it with a most piercing gaze.

The glittering object moved, although but slowly.

Still it did move, and not for long did Dick remain in doubt as to what it was.

The great distance at which the object appeared to be would at once account for its motion seeming to be so slow.

It was a portion of the troop of dragoons.

It might be that their horses were going at a walking pace only, but that it was from the accoutrements of the soldiers that the glittering proceeded Dick felt confident.

He did not yet venture to arouse his companion, but resolved to do so should the troop draw nearer.

But this they did not appear to do.

Their course, slow as it seemed, was still continued at the same rate; but Turpin fancied that they came no nearer to the inn.

After a time he was convinced of this, and then he came to a correct conclusion upon the point.

The dragoons he had seen were pursuing a road parallel with the one on which the inn was built, and he was presently confirmed in this idea by perceiving that the dragoons slowly receded from his view, till at length they vanished altogether.

It was just after this that Tom King entered the room. The time allotted to him for sleep had now expired.

CHAPTER CCCCIV.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING ENDEAVOUR TO ARRANGE THEIR FUTURE PROCEEDINGS.

So absorbed was Dick Turpin's attention, that he was unconscious of Tom King having entered the room.

He did not hear the unclosing of the door, nor yet his comrade's footstep as he approached him.

It was not, indeed, until Tom placed his hand upon his shoulder that Dick became aware of his presence.

He started and turned round, but he was reassured the moment he caught sight of his companion's countenance.

"Has my term of watching just expired, then?"

"It has. Has the time passed so quickly that you were unconscious of it?"

"The fact is, Tom, my attention has been much absorbed for some time past."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing of an alarming character, I hope."

"That's well."

"Sit down a moment, Tom, and I will tell you."

"Do so. I was about to ask you to remain. I, too, have something I wish to say, and perhaps we shall not be able to find a better opportunity than the present."

"What is it you wish to say?"

"That you shall know presently. Let me hear you first."

Dick made no demur or hesitation, but at once told his comrade what he had seen.

We need not repeat his words, for the reader already knows the subject of his communication.

At first Tom was anxious, but, by the time our hero had finished his narrative, his uneasiness very much abated.

"The dragoons are hovering around us, that is certain, and the sooner we get to some other part of the country from this the better."

"Undoubtedly; and that at once brings me to the subject upon which I wished to speak to you."

"What, our leaving this place?"

"Yes."

"I had made up my mind to take my departure this very night and to travel until daybreak, by which time we shall be at a considerable distance from the scene of our late exploits."

"So we should; and, what I regret is, the difficulties which lie in the way of our departing from here to-night."

"Difficulties?" repeated Dick. "What difficulties?"

"Can it be possible that you are ignorant of them?"

Dick reflected a moment.

"I see, the same thought has not occurred to you," continued Tom King. "The difficulty is, Maud."

"Maud?"

"Yes. Cannot you see that it will be impossible to leave her without doing so in a manner highly calculated to excite the suspicions of the landlord, whose curiosity we have good reason to believe is already so much inflamed? Can you see that, as we are now situated, we cannot direct our steps to a place of safety without both distressing Black Bess, and calling forth the attention of all those persons we may chance to encounter?"

"I see it all now," said Dick, who had been silent and thoughtful during his companion's long speech.

"I see it all now, and am at a loss to think how I could have overlooked it."

"I have been thinking of it for some time," returned Tom King; "and I think the matter one of sufficient importance to call for immediate attention."

"It is, it is."

"We ought, too, to make some kind of arrangement as to our future plan of action. We have much to reflect upon ere we can come to a decision."

"We have, indeed."

"But first of all we must make up our mind as to what we are to do to-night. I am of opinion that to remain here will be running a greater risk than we are justified in incurring."

"Yet, what is to be done? Maud cannot be left behind."

"True; and it is equally certain that it will never do to take her with us as we brought her here. It would be folly to think of reaching a place of safety."

"What do you propose, Tom? If you have considered this matter over I am sure you have come to some conclusion. You are not one to point out a difficulty without being able to suggest a remedy."

"I have certainly thought over different modes of getting out of this dilemma."

"And you found one that was better than the rest; one, in fact, that would perfectly answer the end we have in view."

"I cannot say for that; but still I have a plan."

"Let me know it, then. Tell it me at once."

"In the first place, then, our difficulty is in taking Maud with us with the means of which we are at present in possession."

"Just so."

"It is clear that Maud must accompany us, and, therefore, what remains is to find some means by which she can do so."

"But what means can be found?"

"That is just it; and much will depend on the reply you give to my next question."

"What is it?"

"Can Maud ride?"

"Oh, yes."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, quite."

"That is all right. The rest is easy."

"Pardon me, but you have not explained yourself very clearly."

"I know I have not, but will do so in a moment. Let us call the landlord and ask him whether he has a horse to dispose of. Doubtless he has, for I saw several in the stable as well as a side-saddle."

"I see now. Your plan is a good one."

"I am glad you think so. It may, perhaps, look suspicious for us to have a female travelling with us in this manner, but it is quite certain it will not be so suspicious as to have her seated before you."

"Certainly not. Tom, I heartily approve of your plan, and am much obliged to you for suggesting it to me, or otherwise I should probably not have seen the danger until at the last moment."

"Shall we call the landlord?"

"If you like."

"I think it will be best to settle this part of the business first. We shall then be better able to talk over our future arrangements."

"Agreed."

"We will call the landlord, then, at once."

"Just so. But I have a caution to give you. I have already said how much his curiosity is inflamed. It will, therefore, be necessary to use great caution in addressing him."

"Trust me for that."

"I can do so, I know; but still, there was no harm in breaching a caution."

"None whatever."

The landlord was now called.

He obeyed the summons with alacrity.

As Tom had truly said, his curiosity was much inflamed. He felt convinced in his own mind that a mystery of some kind hung over his customers, and though a thousand different solutions suggested themselves to his mind, he failed to hit upon the right one.

He was glad enough to make his way into the chamber, for he hoped thereby to glean some additional information.

Assuming a most obsequious manner, he bowed low as he entered the room, and said—

"What are your commands, gentlemen?"

"A bottle of your best port and three wine-glasses, landlord," said Dick Turpin.

Mr. Goodridge bowed, and withdrew.

"Three wine-glasses!" he muttered, as he descended the stairs. "What can they want with three wine-glasses? The lady is not with them, but perhaps she will come presently. That must be it! The third wine-glass is for the lady."

Thus muttering and ruminating, the landlord proceeded to execute his guests' commands.

Then, going up once more into the room, he was surprised to hear Dick say—

"Put the bottle and glasses on the table, landlord, and bring a chair and sit down with us. We want to speak to you."

The landlord was completely taken aback.

This was what he was furthest from expecting.

Nevertheless, he retained sufficient self-possession to obey, and, drawing a chair to the table, he sat down in an attitude compounded of assurance and deference.

In the meantime, Turpin proceeded to draw the cork from the bottle of wine, and, having done so, filled the three glasses.

One was pushed towards the landlord, who took it with a trembling and expectant hand, and a toast having been proposed, he raised it to his lips.

The two highwaymen emptied their glasses at one gulp, and then Dick Turpin somewhat abruptly approached the business he had in hand.

"Landlord," he said, "I have called you to see whether you can assist us out of a little difficulty. You look a man of discernment and experience, and, for that reason, we have ventured to trouble you with our affairs."

At this very flattering speech the landlord grinned complacently, and, bowing his head with an affectation of modesty, said nothing, but waited for our hero to proceed.

"I fancy I was not wrong in thinking that you would do your best to serve us in our present strait."

"You were quite right, sir," said the landlord; "and, in this business as well as in every other, it will be my constant effort to deserve satisfaction."

"That is all right," said Turpin; "and now to come to the point. That young lady who called here to see us wishes to continue her journey in our company, but, unfortunately, it is impossible."

"How impossible?"

"Why, you see, we have but a horse a piece, and she cannot ride upon one of these."

"Certainly not."

"Well, then, what we want is to find some means of allowing her to travel along with us."

"I understand," said the landlord; "and it so happens that I can get you out of your difficulty without any trouble at all."

"I am glad to hear that," said Dick. "Have another glass of wine."

He pushed the bottle towards the landlord as he spoke, who did not hesitate to replenish his glass.

"I can see my way clear enough," continued Mr. Goodridge, "provided one thing."

"What?"

"That the lady can ride."

"Oh! yes; the lady can ride."

The landlord rubbed his hands together in a satisfied manner.

"Then," he said, "I have got as nice a lady's horse in my stable as ever was coaled. I bought it very cheap

some days ago, thinking I might some day sell it to advantage."

"Well, an opportunity has now offered itself. I am quite willing to buy the horse for the lady if it is a good one."

"Come down and see it," said the landlord, forgetting his curiosity in the prospect of selling the horse advantageously. "Come down, and I'll show it you at once."

"All right, so we will; but we will finish this bottle first."

More glasses were filled and emptied, and then all three rose.

Tom King and the landlord went first, but Turpin lingered behind.

Tom knew his motive, and contrived to occupy the whole of the landlord's attention.

Turpin tapped at the door of Maud's room.

She opened it in a moment, and her face lighted up with pleasure when she saw who it was.

"Fear nothing, Maud; all is well. I am going down into the inn-yard to try and purchase a horse for you to ride upon. Do not detain me."

After speaking these hasty words of explanation, Dick hastened down the stairs and overtook the landlord and Tom near the bar, where they had paused and waited for him.

Maud closed the door of her room, and sprang to the window, from which, as she was well aware, she could see the whole of the inn-yard and the stables.

Ere she had occupied this post a moment, she saw the trio make their appearance, and she watched them as they took their course towards the stables.

It is with the doings of the highwaymen, however, that we are chiefly interested.

With an alacrity which he could not conceal or diminish, the landlord hurried across the yard, calling out lustily to the ostler as he did so.

That worthy made his appearance after a brief delay, for he had been upon the loft cutting chaff.

At the bidding of the landlord he re-entered the stable and fetched the lady's horse.

It was a fine-looking animal, and our two friends were delighted the moment they saw it.

A closer examination had no other effect than to confirm them in their good opinion.

It was really a first-class animal, and, apparently, without the slightest defect or blemish.

The landlord, like a keen man of business, noted the expression of pleasure which appeared upon their faces, and took his cue from it accordingly.

"What is your price?" said Dick, when he had finished making his examination.

The landlord paused a moment, and Tom King added—

"You told us you bought the horse cheap. Now, don't try to get too much out of it. We did not anticipate having to make this purchase, and we are rather short of funds."

At this announcement the landlord calmed down somewhat, and altered the sum he had just thought of mentioning.

"I'll tell you what I can do, and it will be fair both for you and for me. As to what I gave for the horse, that's neither here nor there. It's honestly worth eighty guineas; but I will take sixty, and that's the very lowest."

To this offer our friends at first said nothing, and having considered a moment or two, said—

"You ask a good round sum for the horse."

"He's worth twenty more; and I should not have named the price I did, had it not been for what your friend said. Of course I want to sell him as soon as I can, because the longer I keep him the less profit I shall get."

"Of course. Now, look here, landlord; besides a horse we want several other things. We want a bridle, a side-saddle, a lady's riding-habit, and a whip. Can you supply us with these?"

"Certainly; I have them all on the premises. They are not new, being those I keep to lend out on hire."

"That will not matter," said Dick. "And now, landlord, I will make you an offer, and you can please yourself about taking it. If you like to let me have the horse and the other things I have mentioned for sixty guineas, why, here's your money."

Our hero slapped his pocket significantly as he spoke. The landlord hesitated a moment, and then he said—

"Well, it's driving a hard bargain, and I was in hopes of doing better. However, if you'll make it sixty-five guineas, I don't mind."

"Well, agreed."

"It's a bargain, then."

"Yes."

Tom King bent his mouth close to Turpin's ear, and whispered:

"We are in a fix now. We haven't got half sixty-five pounds between us."

CHAPTER CCCC.V.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN PLAN AN EXCURSION ON THE HIGHWAY.

DICK TURPIN changed countenance slightly when Tom King made this announcement, but, recovering himself almost immediately, he said to the landlord:

"I am not quite sure whether we shall start to-night."

"All right, gentlemen, as long as you like. My house and myself are quite at your disposal."

"However," continued Dick, "to do things fair and business-like, as well as to clinch the bargain, look, here is something on account."

So saying, our hero took from his pocket a leather bag, from which he counted out twenty guineas into the landlord's hand, who received them with evident satisfaction.

"We will consider the matter as settled now," he said.

"Just so."

The horse was then led back into the stable, and our friends returned to the house.

Upon entering their own room they sat down near the window, and Tom said:

"Well, Dick, you have bought the horse and paid twenty guineas on account, but where the remaining forty-five are to come from I don't know."

"Don't you? then I will tell you. Where plenty more has come from."

"It would be ridiculous upon my part to affect to misunderstand you. You mean, you would seek for the remainder of the money by an adventure on the road?"

"Just so."

"But think of the danger."

"It is great, I admit."

"You cannot help doing so. It is something more than great."

"Nevertheless, the danger must be braved. Tom, my friend, listen to me. You were at some pains, a little while ago, to show me that Mad must have a steed for herself. We obtain one, and not having money enough to purchase it, we must get the remainder how we may."

"I know all that, but think of the inevitable effects that would result from our levying contributions on the highway just at the present time. The idea is suicidal in the extreme. The roads are filled with dragoons, and if we have so far eluded them, a robbery would immediately set them upon our track."

"I am quite willing to admit the amount of danger there must be in any such attempt, but nevertheless, the money must be obtained. But stay; a fresh thought strikes me. I have nothing but your word that we have not money enough between us to make this purchase. Turn out the contents of your pockets and let us see."

Tom King willingly enough complied with this request, for he would have been only too glad to have owned himself in error, and discovered that they really did possess sufficient money.

But he had small hopes of this, for, some little time back, he had taken the trouble to ascertain with tolerable exactitude the state of their finances, and it was in consequence of this that he spoke to Turpin in the manner we have recorded at the close of the preceding chapter. As for Dick himself, with characteristic carelessness, he never troubled himself about the amount of funds in hand, and the probability is, he would not have discovered he was short of so much until the actual time of settlement arrived.

Thanks, however, to the forethought of Tom King, this disagreeable occurrence was avoided by being made known in good time.

Turpin quickly produced from his pockets all the money he possessed, and then, sweeping his own and his comrade's into one heap, began to count it,

Long before he had finished his task, he became painfully aware that there was nothing like sufficient.

Tom King was right.

The total amount of money before them was under thirteen pounds.

"That is what I said," exclaimed Tom King, as soon as Dick had announced the result. "And we are in a much greater fix than you feel inclined to admit."

"Not so."

"I say we are. Doubtless one good adventure on the road would place in our possession the money we require to complete the purchase, but then think of the imminent danger of such an adventure at the present time. Our position is, in my opinion, by far more ticklish than you seem to think it. Our only chance to preserve our lives and liberties is to keep quiet for some length of time; and one such exploit as you propose would bring all our enemies upon our track before we had time to get fairly off."

"I understand all this quite clearly," said Dick Turpin; "and you must not fall into the error of supposing that I underrate the danger. I do not. I quite agree with you as to the policy of keeping as quiet as possible, and no other circumstances than those which have occurred would induce me to attempt an adventure on the highway. But the money must be had, and, for my part, I can see no other means by which we can obtain it."

"Nor I. In fact, there is no other."

"Very well, then; we must resign ourselves to necessity, and try our best to avert the consequences you have just foretold."

"Then there is another thing," said Tom King. "A little while ago you agreed with me in saying that it would be unsafe in the extreme for us to pass the night in the inn, but in the event of an excursion such as you propose, how are we to avoid doing so?"

"That is a serious objection, I must confess, and yet I think it can be got over."

"How so?"

"Night is fast closing in. Look! Dusk has unconsciously stolen upon us."

It was as he had said.

The time had passed rapidly, and now they found that the shadows of evening were beginning to gather in the room, rendering all things indistinct.

The brief winter's day was fast approaching a close.

"In a little while," continued Turpin, "it will be quite dark. As soon as it is so. I will depart, and, if luck befriends me as she hitherto has done, I shall return here before the night is so far advanced as to prevent our departure."

"Stay a moment," said Tom King, gravely. "I beg that you will attend to what I am about to say."

"What is it?"

"I can see that the money must be had, and that there is no other means of obtaining it than by going upon the road, great as is the danger of such a proceeding, and much as I wish it could be avoided. But that is, unfortunately, quite out of the question. Turpin, you have spoken about setting out."

"Certainly I have."

"Then I hope you will understand me properly. For a long time we have been friends; and, by the long continuance of that friendship, I desire you to grant me a favour—"

"You need not go on any further with your speech," interrupted Dick Turpin, with a smile. "I know the favour you wish to beg."

"It is that I may depart upon this expedition instead of yourself."

"I knew that."

"And you will let me?"

"Nay—nay. I do not see how I can do so. It is on my account that the money is to be obtained—it is through me that this extra risk will have to be run—and surely I ought to be the person who should have the responsibility."

"That seems correct," said Tom King; "but I think I shall get you to consent to remain here while I depart upon this errand."

Dick smiled, and shook his head negatively.

"I still think so," said Tom King. "I admit all that you say, and must admit that it sounds just and reason-

able. But, for all that, I think I ought to go, and not you."

"Why?"

"Simply on account of the landlord."

"The landlord?"

"Yes; for his inordinate curiosity we have everything to fear."

"Still I do not comprehend"—

"But you will in a moment. Maud is a woman. You will scarcely be able to disguise from her the errand upon which you are going, or, even if you do, she, knowing as she does the perils with which you are surrounded, will be in a state of dreadful anxiety and suspense until you return. It is tolerably certain that I shall not be able to soothe her—that nothing that I can say will have any effect in calming her agitation."

"Yes, I know all that; but"—

"Do not interrupt me, but listen until you hear all that I have to say. With the landlord's curiosity aroused, as it certainly would be, by your departure, he would infallibly notice Maud's agitation, and then there is no means of ascertaining the consequences which may result from his prying inquisitiveness. On the other hand, should I go in your place, you will be able to keep Maud calm and quiet, and the landlord would find no fresh food for his curiosity. I have one more reason to urge why I should go instead of yourself, and that is, I should be cooler and calmer than you, and, for that reason, more likely to meet with success, because you would feel anxious as to what was taking place here; and, in the hour of danger, that very anxiety might so much unnerve you as to cause your destruction."

To the arguments thus set forth by his comrade, Dick Turpin listened with profoundest attention.

He could not conceal from himself that all that Tom said was marked with the utmost good sense, yet he did not like the idea of allowing Tom King to depart on an expedition which he considered so peculiarly his own.

Tom King could derive no profit from it, and certainly would run into very great danger.

In the end, however, after much discussion, Dick Turpin was prevailed upon by his companion to abandon his original intention, and stay at the inn while he went in his place.

It was on Maud's account, however, that Dick relented, for he was unwilling to give her more cause for anxiety and uneasiness of mind than he could help.

That Tom King stood a much better chance of succeeding in the enterprise there can be little doubt, for he could be cool, and calm, and collected, while Turpin, could only be so by the maintenance of a continual effort.

Yet it was reluctantly and unwillingly that Dick did give way, and more than once he felt inclined to rescind his decision.

On each occasion, however, Tom King overruled him.

By this time darkness had fully come, and they were aroused by a faint tapping at the door of the chamber.

Upon permission being given to enter, the door was thrown open, and the landlord appeared upon the threshold with two lighted candles in his hand.

"I waited for some time, gentlemen," he said, in an apologetic tone of voice as he advanced and set the candles down upon the table, "but, finding you did not ring for lights, as I fully expected you would, I made so bold as to bring them without having any commands to do so."

While the landlord spoke, both of the highwaymen fixed their eyes with great intentness upon his countenance.

But they could glean nothing from it.

Its impassable expression baffled them.

His sudden entrance, uncalled for, they could not help looking upon as a suspicious circumstance.

Whether they were right or not time alone could show.

His entrance had, however, one good effect.

It confirmed Dick in the policy of remaining with Maud while Tom King was absent upon his hazardous expedition.

Perceiving that the highwayman made no reply to his speech, the landlord asked a direct question.

It was his old and oft-repeated one.

"Have you any commands for me, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom King,

The landlord looked at him expectantly.

"I want my horse saddled immediately. I am going out for an hour or so."

"Very well, sir," returned the landlord, with his usual imperturbability; "you shall be obeyed."

He turned round and left the room as he spoke.

As soon as the door was closed, Tom King said—

"What do you think of the landlord, now?"

"I am at a loss to say."

"So am I, except that I consider his conduct grows more and more suspicious, and it behoves you to keep a careful look out upon him while I am away."

"I shall do so, you may depend. I can assure you I feel anything but comfortable when I think about him."

"There is no immediate dread," said Tom King, as he carefully loaded his pistols, "though I quite think you ought to be careful. Have your eyes open to every occurrence, no matter how trivial."

"Trust me."

"Very well, then. As I am ready, I will go. Farewell."

"Nay, nay; I will accompany you to the stables."

"Upon no account."

"Why not?"

"Because I want to have a few words with the ostler."

"But I shall not prevent that. You will have nothing to say to him that you do not want me to hear?"

"No, no; you mistake me entirely. I want to get that meddling, officious, inquisitive landlord out of the way. If we both go to the stables he will be sure to accompany us, in the hope of finding out something, and he will not be at a loss for an excuse."

"But he will accompany you if you go alone."

"No, not so; when I descend I will send him up to you, and tell him you want to see him. Upon some pretext or other contrive to detain him until I am off. You will have little difficulty in doing so."

"Oh, none at all—none at all. But, Tom, I cannot help expressing my admiration at the ready way you have of getting out of a difficulty. I will take care the landlord don't trouble you if you will send him up to me."

CHAPTER CCCCVI.

TOM KING ONCE MORE FINDS HIMSELF UPON THE ROAD, AND MEETS WITH A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

"Very good," said Tom King; "and, as that is all arranged, and as I am quite ready, I will be off at once. It is not worth while to delay."

"Be careful," said Dick Turpin, as he took his comrade's hand and shook it warmly. "Remember how much depends upon your success."

"I will be careful, rely upon it; and now, for the present, farewell!"

"Farewell!" said Dick; "and you may rest assured that ere long I shall find some means of requiting this service."

"Pho—pho; Never mention that. Hark! I hear the stairs creak. Some one is ascending."

Scarcely had he uttered these words, than there came a faint tap-tap at the door, and, upon permission being given, the landlord entered.

Bowing low, he said—

"Your horse is quite ready, sir, and waiting; and, if you will be pleased to follow me, I will lead you to the stables."

At these words Turpin and King involuntarily changed glances.

They so exactly bore out what the other had said.

"I am just ready too," said Tom King, in reply.

"This way, if you please," said the landlord.

Tom King fully expected that Dick would say something to detain the landlord, but to his surprise he did not.

Nevertheless, feeling sure that his comrade understood him, and that he might safely leave him to do as he promised, he did not hesitate to follow the landlord out of the room and down the stairs.

When they had gone about half way down, he had reason to congratulate himself for not having interfered, for just then he heard his comrade call out—

"Landlord—landlord!"

Of course Mr. Goodridge paused.

"My friend wants you," said Tom King, quickly; "and

up and see what he wants. I can easily find the way to the stables myself."

The landlord uttered an ejaculation of impatience, but he had no resource but to obey.

Most unwillingly, then, he reascended the stairs.

Tom resolved to make the best use of his time, so ran down the remainder as fast as he could and hurried to the stable, for he was by no means certain that Dick would be able to keep the landlord upstairs.

From his manner when he turned round to obey the call, it was clear that he had quite set his heart upon going to the stables and seeing Tom off.

The first thing our friend did on emerging from the back door of the inn, was to look up at the sky and note its aspect.

He was pleased with its appearance, for he saw that the night was one that just suited his purpose.

The whole face of the heavens was covered with one huge black cloud.

There was no wind, and a slight hazy fog floated here and there, giving an appearance of indistinctness to all things.

On such a night Tom felt the most daring enterprise could be carried out successfully, and he walked across the yard towards the stable with a feeling of light-hearted confidence.

The ostler must have heard his approaching footstep, for, when he drew near, he opened the door of the stable, and led the horse out fully caparisoned.

A lamp was burning just inside, and this illuminated the ground round the stable for some distance.

Ere he ventured to mount, he carefully examined all the trappings to see that all was right, for he knew by experience how necessary it was to ascertain this before starting.

The ostler had, however, done his duty well, for the highwayman was unable to find anything out of place.

In another moment, Tom King had vaulted lightly and easily into the saddle.

The ostler held the horse by the bridle while he did so. Tom King took the reins, and then plunged his hand into his pocket.

He drew out a five-shilling piece.

"Ostler," he said.

The man addressed grinned and touched his forehead.

"You have done your duty well, so here is a crown-piece."

"Thank you, sir," was the reply, as Tom King slipped the coin mentioned into his hand.

"I hope you will understand," continued the highwayman, "that we feel inclined to be liberal with you if you will only serve us faithfully, and obey our orders promptly. That is but an earnest of what you will receive. I am going out for an hour, perhaps four or five. Don't go to bed while I am away. Sit up until I return. As soon as you hear me coming, run out, take the horse, groom it instantly, and place it in the stable in such a condition that no one could tell it had been out. Do you understand me?"

"Quite well, your honour."

"Very well, then. Attend to my instructions and you will find you will have no cause to regret it."

The ostler once more touched his forehead, and promised strict attention and obedience.

Having thus made matters right, Tom King seated himself firmly in the saddle and touched his steed lightly with his heavy riding-whip, which formed, when the lash was coiled round the hand, a very formidable weapon of offence and defence.

It was then somewhat similar to the modern weapon misnamed a life-preserver.

The horse's hoofs made a prodigious clatter on the stones with which the inn-yard was paved, and just as he emerged into the road, our friend caught sight of the inquisitive landlord standing at the front door of the inn.

But Tom did not check his speed in the least, and in less than a moment was lost to sight in the obscurity of the evening, though not to hearing, for the beat of his horse's hoofs rung out clearly and sharply upon the night air.

At length, they, too, ceased, and then the landlord, with a sigh of disappointment, turned back into the inn.

There was a wild, gleeful feeling about Tom King's heart as his horse bounded gallantly over the hard road.

His blood circulated in his veins with redoubled speed, and such a sensation of exultation took possession of him that he felt as though he could cry out aloud for very joy.

This impulse, however, he restrained, and by degrees reined in his steed, for he had no wish to distress it unnecessarily.

Subsiding at length to a trot, which the horse could perform with ease, he began to look about him for an adventure.

But he seemed to have the road all to himself, for, as yet, although he had come a considerable distance from the inn, he had not met with a single individual.

During the whole of the time, too, he had kept his ears on the stretch, listening intently for the slightest sound, for he could not tell how soon he might encounter one of the numerous troops of dragoons, who, he knew, were patrolling the roads.

He thought it probable, however, that the discovery that they were in the neighbourhood of Enfield Chase would have the effect of concentrating the soldiers about that spot.

As the reader may be sure, Tom took the road that would lead him not only away from Enfield Chase, but away from London also.

This was wise, for, as a matter of course, it diminished the chances of meeting with his foes.

A long time had elapsed since he had an adventure on the road, but in the interim he had forgotten none of his skill.

For this reason, then, although he was so environed by danger as he was, he hoped to be able to escape capture.

Being now, however, as he considered at a sufficient distance from the inn, he decreased his speed still more, until at length his horse proceeded at a walk only.

Suddenly a faint sound struck on his ear.

So faint was it, that it scarcely rose above the other noises with which the night air was filled, but the practised ear of the highwayman detected it.

He was, besides, able at once to recognise its character.

It was the sound produced by horses' hoofs.

They came from before him, though, from the extreme faintness of the sound, the rider whose approach was thus indicated, must have been at a considerable distance.

Tom King continued to advance at a walking pace, and had the satisfaction of hearing the sound increase in loudness and distinctness every moment, until there was no longer room to doubt the nature of it.

Presently Tom paused.

He had reached a piece of roadway which would, he considered, answer his purpose admirably, and he determined to go no further, but here await the coming of the traveller.

The place needs some description.

The roadway just where he had taken up his position was bounded by an embankment on both sides.

From the shape and general appearance of this, it would seem as though the greater portion of a hill had been cut away, in order to reduce the road to a more uniform gradient.

Such places are common in England, and, as the road alone is reduced to a level, and the fields on each side left untouched, the natural consequence is the formation of an embankment or cutting.

Tom paused as near as possible in the centre of this place, where the embankment on both sides was highest.

The effect of this was to plunge the piece of roadway into profound darkness.

One horseman alone was approaching—the sound of the horse's hoofs assured the highwayman of this—and he backed his horse as close to the side of the embankment as he could, turning his head away from the direction the traveller was coming.

Next, taking a pistol from his pocket, and holding it in an attitude ready for immediate service, Tom patiently awaited his coming.

The horseman, whoever he was, came on at a swift trot. Little did he think of the danger to which he was hurrying.

Doubtless aware that he had a disagreeable piece of road to traverse, he increased his horse's speed in order to pass through it as quickly as possible.



[DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND MAUD ARE ALARMED AT THE APPROACH OF THE DRAGOONS.]

On he came, but, somehow, as he drew nearer and nearer to the spot where the highwayman was lying in ambush, his pace faltered, and he insensibly drew in the rein.

Still he came on at a trot.

And now, when he came within a short distance of him, Tom King again exerted all his powers of hearing, in order to learn for certain whether the coming traveller was or was not alone upon the road.

Had he heard the echoing beat of another horse's foot he would have allowed the horseman to have passed by unmolested, as it would have been running too great a risk to attack him.

But all was still.

No other sound broke upon the universal silence.

The traveller was alone.

Tom King prepared for action.

He gathered the reins up in his hand, and grasped his pistol tightly.

One touch with his heel would, he knew, cause his obe-

dient and well-trained steed to bound forward like an arrow.

On came the traveller.

Nearer and nearer he came at the same strange, faltering, hesitating pace.

In another moment, Tom, whose straining eyes had, to a certain extent, become habituated to the darkness, caught sight of his horse's head.

He was abreast with him.

Like a dart, Tom's steed bounded forward.

"Halt!" cried the highwayman, in tones of startling abruptness, which rung out loud and clear. "Halt! I say, or I fire, and the consequences be upon your own head."

It was easy to see that the rider was completely taken aback by the suddenness with which the highwayman had pounced out upon him.

But he was a brave man.

Recovering himself instantly, he plucked the reins of his spurs deep into his horse's flanks.

With a cry of agony—half a snort and half a groan—

the poor creature reared up, and then bounded forward at a pace which could be designated by no other term than the appropriate one of break-neck.

It was evident the rider did not feel inclined to stop when he was bidden, and preferred to take the consequences of a refusal upon his own head.

To speak the truth, Tom King was scarcely prepared for this.

Nevertheless, he was as good as his word, and fired his pistol at the flying form, while at the same moment he urged his own horse to make his utmost speed.

The discharge of the pistol was followed by a blinding sheet of flame, which, for a moment, revealed the wild-looking aspect of the scene, and the tremendous report which echoed and re-echoed among the hills.

Whether his shot had taken any effect, Tom King knew not.

He had fired too suddenly to take anything like a correct aim, and he had no doubt in his own mind that the bullet had buried itself in the soft earth of which the embankment was composed.

He was confirmed in this opinion by the rapidity with which the traveller tore along.

The ground had a slight tendency downward, and this made his progress more rapid.

As we have said, Tom King urged his horse to the utmost.

But, in spite of all his efforts, he was unable to overtake the traveller's horse, which, maddened by pain and terrified by the explosion of the pistol, tore over the ground as no other horse had before.

Still he did not gain much upon Tom King, who, however, could not overtake him.

The bottom of the hill was reached, but on the level ground the horse continued his unabated speed.

In the excitement of this chase Tom King forgot everything but his determination to overtake the traveller.

He forgot the caution it was so necessary he should exercise.

He forgot that the dragoons were on the road along which he was flying at such a tremendous rate.

He forgot that his capture was imminent should he approach them too closely.

But the bold highwayman was oblivious of everything save his resolve.

His streaming eyes were fixed upon the forms of the traveller and his steed, which seemed to flit before him through the darkness with the swiftness of a phantom.

CHAPTER CCCCXII.

TOM KING PURSUES THE TRAVELLER DOWN THE LEASE, AND MAKES AN UNEXPECTED AND TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

SUDDENLY, however, and when his speed appeared to have attained its maximum, the traveller's horse swerved rapidly on one side, and darted down a narrow lane that ran at right angles to the main road.

So swiftly was this done, that, though Tom King was in the rear and witnessed it, yet he was unable to check the progress of his own steed sufficiently to follow his example.

He pulled tightly at the rein, and the gallant creature strove to stop itself, but was unable to do so until the lane had been passed.

It was then necessary to come to a dead stop, and turn round.

This Tom did, and at a swift trot swept round the corner.

He found himself in one of those beautiful umbrageous lanes which are to be found nowhere else in the world but in England.

It was bordered on both sides by tall, thick hedges planted upon the top of an embankment, while here and there tall trees grew up in the summer time, casting their delicious shade over the lane, but now the branches were quite bare and leafless, giving an appearance of melancholy to the whole scene.

Tom King just gave a glance at the scene, and then directed all his attention to the object he had in view.

Faintly—very faintly—there came upon his ear the dull and rapid beat of a horse's hoofs.

The traveller had evidently got a good start, but the highwayman was determined that he should not escape.

Urging his horse forward by means of voice, whip, and spur, Tom tore over the uneven ground in the lane with a speed that was truly dangerous.

But King was wrought up to a pitch of desperation in consequence of what had taken place, and he determined not to abandon the chase until he was convinced that there would be no good in continuing it.

He was annoyed to think that in the first instance he had managed things so badly as to allow the traveller to slip through his fingers.

Away, then, he went down this narrow, winding lane.

It was very dark, for the thick clouds with which the sky was covered, effectually shut out the beams of the moon, although she was some distance above the horizon.

A faint, gray tint in the clouds denoted her whereabouts, but that was all.

As he continued his headlong course down the lane, Tom King leaned forward in his saddle, and listened with the utmost intendment.

Suddenly the sound of the horse's hoofs ceased.

What could be the reason of it?

He was sure that the cessation of sound had not taken place in consequence of the traveller having got out of earshot.

If this had been the case, the sound would have died gradually away.

But so far from this, he heard the hoof-beats one moment, and the next they ceased.

There could be but one explanation of this event.

The horse had come to a sudden stop.

Tom King grasped a pistol in his right hand, holding it in such a manner as to be available for immediate service, for he could not tell the meaning of this manoeuvre.

He slackened his pace, too, so that if necessary he could pull up in a moment.

It was well he took these precautions.

The dense clouds parted, and through the rift the moon shone with beautiful effect, bringing into view all the different objects with which the highwayman was surrounded.

It was just as this took place that Tom King went round a bend in the lane.

To his surprise, he then saw before him, by the aid of the moonbeams, a pair of large iron gates.

Before these stood the traveller's horse, but he was riderless.

Tom King uttered an ejaculation of astonishment as he saw this.

The horse was making a strange moaning, groaning sound.

Eagerly Tom King glanced about him, anxious in the extreme to ascertain the whereabouts of the traveller.

The moonbeams were of great service to him on this occasion, for, coming from a high point in the sky, the roadway was rendered clearly visible.

A moment's glance enabled him to descry upon the ground the body of a man, or something that looked marvellously like it.

It was lying near the horse.

It was the traveller, no doubt.

When this extraordinary scene presented itself before him, Tom King reined in instinctively directly he caught sight of it.

He was about twenty yards from the horse.

In an infinitesimal portion of time more can be seen than can be described in an hour.

Briefly, however, we will endeavour to show the reader all that Tom King beheld.

As we have said, a dark-looking man, which, from its general appearance, he imagined to be the body of the traveller, was lying by the side of the horse, and partially in the shadow which his body cast upon the moonlit lane.

The horse, trembling and groaning, was standing with his head close to the iron gate, as though he was desirous to pass through it.

This, however, was impossible; and the great height made it a barrier which no horse could overleap.

These large iron gates, which looked like the entrance gates to a nobleman's or a gentleman's grounds, were flanked on both sides by a massive stone wall of great

height, and which extended to the right and left as far as Tom could see.

On the other side of the wall, and through the foliage-work of the gate, could be seen a kind of park, beautifully laid out and well stocked with trees.

Over the tops of these the chimneys, gables and roof-tops of a mansion glittered in the clear moonlight.

The picture was one of exquisite beauty, and one that any person could have gazed at for a long time without weariness, because some fresh beauty presented itself at every moment.

Such, then, is a feeble description of the scene which was spread before Tom King when he halted after having passed round the bend in the lane.

He could not forbear to pause and look upon it.

It was evident that the lane led nowhere else, save to these gates, and these gates clearly led to the mansion.

It was certainly not the front or main entrance—perhaps it was the one made use of by the domestics.

The tall hedgerows grew right down to the massive buttresses of the gates, and the stone wall divided the park, if such it was, from the meadows.

This lane was, then, probably a private road leading only to the mansion.

Why, then, should the traveller have turned down it, for it was only taking him into a trap.

Tom knew not.

To linger there, however, gazing as he was, would certainly accomplish nothing; and so he touched his horse lightly with the spur to urge him forward, for he was anxious to obtain a closer view of the traveller.

To his surprise, however, the horse resolutely refused to stir.

He then, for the first time, noticed that his steed gave indications of suffering under the greatest terror.

His nostrils were dilated, his eyes expanded, and he exhibited every token of alarm.

Tom patted his neck; but, perceiving how great was his disinclination to advance, did not press him to do so, but alighted, and secured his steed by the bridle to the trunk of a tree that grew by the side of the lane.

He then stepped forward on foot, but to his annoyance the rift in the clouds, through which the moon had been shining, closed up, leaving the lane in all the greater darkness from the contrast.

In spite, however, of this adverse incident, he continued to advance towards the iron gates, which were still visible.

It took little more than a minute to reach the spot where the traveller was lying, for the distance was not more than twenty yards.

Upon arriving here he looked anxiously up at the sky, in order to see whether there was any prospect of the moon breaking forth again—for her light would have rendered him essential service.

To his joy he saw a long, irregular shaped fissure, in which the stars could be seen twinkling brightly.

The moon was on the borders of the fissure, and in a moment or so more would certainly break forth.

He waited, therefore, until this time arrived before he attempted to do anything.

Gradually, as the moon got nearer and nearer to the fissure, her light shone through the thinner clouds which fringed it, and cast a dim halo around.

Gradually this brightened, and once more the details of the extraordinary scene were brought before Tom's view.

Without loss of time he stooped down over the prostrate form.

It was a man, and he was lying in a strange, huddled-up position.

That he was either dead or else seriously wounded, there could be no doubt.

Repugnant as it was to his feelings, Tom took hold of one of his arms and dragged his body into the lane, where the moonbeams would fall unobstructedly upon it.

The face was turned upwards, and its peculiar expression told Tom in a moment that the traveller, whoever he was, was dead.

From various portions of his clothing came various scintillations of light, which showed where diamonds were fixed upon it, and the material was of the best description, most elegantly and expensively trimmed.

The wearer was some person either of wealth or rank—probably both.

The pallid features were delicately formed, and, even in death, had an aristocratic appearance.

How he had come by his death was, at first, uncertain.

It might be that the horse, stopping short, had thrown him out of the saddle, or it might be that he owed his death to the pistol-shot which Tom had fired at him, but which the highwayman did not think had taken effect, because it was fired without aim, and because the traveller had continued his headlong speed.

This was a point, however, which Tom King resolved to ascertain.

Stooping down over him, he looked closely at him.

At first he saw no wound, and was about to adopt his first supposition as the true one, when he felt something wet on the breast of the traveller's coat as he passed his hand over it.

Tom held up his hand in the moonlight and looked at it. It was stained with blood.

Hastily wiping it away, he unfastened the traveller's clothing, and at length his breast was exposed to view.

In this a small round hole was visible, from which the crimson fluid welled slowly.

The wound was such as a pistol would have produced, and was situated on the right-hand side of his breast.

Very little blood indeed flowed from it, and his clothing was little more than stained.

It was evident, then, that the wound had bled inwardly, and, from its position and proximity to his heart, he felt sure it must be mortal.

This was a discovery which Tom King far from anticipated, and he shuddered with horror at the suddenness with which it had come upon him.

The body was quite warm, but the heart had ceased to beat, and the features were fast becoming fixed in the stern rigidity of death.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Tom King; "can it be possible? I had no idea that the shot which I fired at random, and under the impulse of the moment, would prove to be a fatal one. But it seems it is so. But how comes the traveller here? Suffering under such a wound, how could he have retained his seat in the saddle long enough to reach this place—and with the horse going at such a frightful speed? And then there was the sudden turn out of the highroad. It is a mystery. I cannot conceive how it was he retained his seat. He must have been a brave man, and one well skilled in the art of riding, or it never could have happened."

As he spoke, Tom King, with sadness upon his countenance, looked again into the face of the traveller.

"Quite dead!" he added; "quite dead. I never saw the impress of death more distinctly visible. Well, it is in vain to grieve. It cannot be helped. I am sorry for what has occurred, but I can do no more than make the best of it. Had he attended to my demands, I should not have fired, and his life would have been spared. It is all over now, though, and all the regrets in the world will not bring him back to life."

So saying, Tom King rose to his feet, and made two steps towards the spot where he had tethered his horse.

Then he stopped suddenly, as he said—

"I forget—I forget my errand. It is money that I require; and from the dress of that dead man, he doubtless carries plenty in his pocket. Now he is dead it can be of no further service to him. Why, then, should I scruple to take it from him? And yet—but I must not give way to such scruples. The night is going fast, and it is important for all that I get back to the inn without delay or further loss of time. Another adventure will be impossible, and the chances are quite against my meeting with anyone like this. He is dead, quite dead, and why should I hesitate? It is weakness, folly! The money is, then, to be had for taking. I wish all this had not occurred, but yet I must have it."

CHAPTER CCXVIII.

IN WHICH TOM KING LEARNS SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE IDENTITY OF THE DEAD TRAVELLER.

ALTHOUGH he uttered these last words in a very resolute manner, yet Tom King advanced towards the body of the dead traveller with a slow and hesitating step.

He felt a certain and very natural amount of repug-

nance to approaching the man for the purpose of rifling his pockets.

It was a deed that he seemed instinctively to shrink from, and most certainly it was one which he had never committed before.

Yet, as he said, why should he recoil from taking it now, when he would have deprived him of it while he lived without remorse.

Now, however, he was dead; and it seemed as though his body ought to be held sacred, and not profaned by the robber's touch.

So powerfully did Tom King feel all this, that had the need of the money been any less urgent than it was, he would have mounted his horse and rode away, leaving the pockets of the dead man untouched.

But he knew how valuable the time was.

They would be compelled to leave the inn that very night, for to depart by daylight would be dangerous to a degree, and there remained to them only one night to find some place of refuge and safety for Mand, as the night after they had appointed to meet their two comrades on the Finchley-road.

The sooner, then, that he was back at the inn the better it would be for their general safety.

Much time had already been consumed, and if he left the traveller, and looked out for another adventure, he might be detained for an indefinite length of time, and in the end run the risk of not obtaining the requisite sum.

Now, however, it was beyond all doubt within his reach, for the prostrate man looked like one who would not travel without valuables.

He was the more inclined to think he carried articles of great value about him from his very conduct.

Had he carried a light purse, he would have surrendered it rather than have run the risk of being fired at.

All these reasons pressed powerfully upon Tom King's mind as he made his way towards the traveller, with a slow and hesitating step.

Making a sudden effort, however, he passed over the remaining space which intervened between them.

Here he knelt down once more upon the ground.

He was easily able to find the pockets, but he did not put his hand into them.

He contented himself with feeling the outside, in order to learn whether there was anything of a bulky character within.

In the breast of his coat he felt something like a pocket-book.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, and found he was quite right.

It was a pocket-book, and, by its appearance, seemed to be full of something.

He opened it; and, as the moon continued to shine, he was enabled to make an examination of its contents.

They were bank-notes.

These were articles that Tom King never cared much about; but, on the present occasion, he thrust them into his pocket.

There was at that time an extreme difficulty in passing bank notes; and he thought perhaps the landlord of the "Mountain Rill" might refuse to take them as payment.

The first feeling of repugnance which he had entertained now passed away, and he resolved to learn whether the traveller had any gold about him.

He was glad he made this second search, for it discovered to him a large bag of gold, which was in the other breast-pocket of his coat.

This Tom took with very great satisfaction.

Just, however, as he was about to rise to his feet, he heard a loud shout, coming apparently from many throats.

He was upon his feet in a second, with his face turned in the direction from which the sound had appeared to come.

Once more the clouds swept over the moon, entirely involving her in their obscurity.

But her beams were not on this occasion wanted by the highwaymen, and he was glad when he found this had taken place.

The shouts which he had heard came from the other side of the iron gates, and that was the direction towards which Tom King's face was turned.

He saw immediately a number of moving lights; and,

after a second glance, he felt convinced they proceeded from lanterns carried by some persons.

What was their object, he knew not; and he was also completely in the dark as to the meaning of the cry to which they had given utterance.

That they were approaching the gate was evident, and the speed at which they came was very great.

Tom King hesitated for a moment as to what he should do.

If he mounted his steed and hastened away, the mere fact of his doing so would put these people on his track, for they were so near that the trampling of his horse's hoofs could not but be heard.

To fly seemed, then, injudicious; and yet, to remain where he was, would be perilous to a degree.

Tom King, however, felt a great degree of curiosity to learn something more than he at present knew respecting the man who lay there so still in death.

Could he conceal himself somewhere close at hand, he felt that he would gladly do so; for, not only would such a course be more conducive to his own safety than any other, but it would also enable him to hear what took place, should the body be discovered; in the event of which, he would surely, he thought, hear something concerning him.

Already in his own mind, though almost without knowing it, he had connected the dead rider with the mansion which he had seen through the trees.

Having come to this resolution, he hastened to the spot where his horse was tethered.

The creature still showed symptoms of fright, and Tom feared that he should have some trouble with it yet.

A glance over his shoulder showed him that the people carrying the lanterns were very close to the gate, and he would have to be very expeditious to escape being seen by them.

What he had to do was to get into the meadows that skirted both sides of the lane, and take his horse with him.

But how he was to accomplish this was the difficulty.

He had not taken particular notice as he came down the lane, but he had no recollection of seeing a gate which led into these fields.

As he now stood, with his hands on his horse's bridle, he glanced up and down; but no gate was in sight.

Then the hedges were too high to be easily or quickly unmounted, and they seemed to be kept in first-rate preservation, so that there were no gaps in it through which he could force his way.

He saw all this at one brief and comprehensive glance.

He untied his horse from the branch of the tree, and then he noticed, for the first time, that there was a small space between the trunk of it and the hedge, which did not grow close to it.

There looked scarcely room to pass through such a place, but there was no choice, so Tom had to make the attempt.

He first of all scrambled up the bank, and managed to get into the meadow, at the expense of a few scratches only.

Then, holding the bridle, he spoke in a low voice to his horse, and tried to pull him up.

The horse seemed to perfectly understand what it was required to do, for he placed his fore feet upon the bank.

Tom pulled again, and the horse, making a kind of leap, forced his way into the meadow.

Tom patted it caressingly.

The grass in the meadow was short, but it was thick, so Tom had no fear of being heard walking over it.

He led the horse close under the hedge, and paused just opposite the spot where the body of the traveller lay.

The hedge was plenty high enough to conceal both Tom King and his steed from the view of anyone standing in the lane, but there were several interstices through which he himself would be able to see all that took place.

He had reached his place of concealment just in time, and that was all.

The party of men he had seen carrying the bundle had now just reached the gate, which they unfastened and passed through.

No sooner was the gate opened, however, than the traveller's horse, which had continued to stand near it, gave utterance to a snorting sound, that alarmed every one who heard it, and then bounded through into the

park—if such it was—with a speed that was absolutely astonishing.

It was out of sight among the dark trunks of the trees in a moment.

Two of the men who were in the act of passing through the gate were thrown down with great violence, and trampled under foot.

Several others were also slightly injured, and a scene of the utmost confusion ensued.

Recovering themselves, they emerged into the lane, and then almost immediately they discovered the body of the traveller.

Those who first beheld it, uttered a shout which caused the others to gather round them.

One stooped down and raised the head, while the others directed the light of their lanterns upon the face.

"Alas! alas!" said one, "this is by far worse than I feared."

"It is indeed a sorry sight," said the one who held his head. "He is quite dead, and as cold as a stone!"

"I knew something was the matter," said another, "when I came by the gate and heard someone groaning. I was too frightened to stop to see what it was, so I ran up to the hall to you."

"Oh! what shall we do!" cried an aged man. "Alas! alas! Little did I think I should live to witness such a sight! Poor master murdered, and at the gates of his own park!"

"It's horrible! How shall we let missus know what has taken place?"

"Alas! I would not be the one that had to communicate such tidings to her."

"Nor I, nor I," said many voices.

"But who could have done such a barbarous deed? He was the best master that ever lived! And now dead—quite dead! Who is there that will tell us what has happened?"

"Do not let us give way to our sorrow in this manner," said one who had not yet spoken. "We do not know that master is dead. He may be in a swoon, or something of that sort. Carry him up to the hall at once, and I will start off for a doctor."

This was so rational a suggestion, that it was immediately acted upon.

"I fear there is no hope," said one. "He is getting quite rigid now, and look where his clothing has been torn open. Poor master has been robbed as well as murdered!"

A shout of execration came from the lips of the domestics as they heard this announcement, and they pressed forward eagerly, so as to assure themselves of the truth of it.

"Perhaps," continued the one who had just spoken, "the robber and murderer is lurking somewhere close at hand. Let some carry the body up to the hall, and let the rest of us make a search for the murderer."

"Agreed! agreed!" they all cried, with one accord.

Four now took up the body, and carried it tenderly through the gate into of the park.

The others, to the number of six or seven, dispersed about the lane.

It was not, of course, very long before they saw the foot-marks on the embankment up which Tom had climbed, and all clustered round this spot as soon as it was discovered.

The horse, too, in scrambling up, had dislodged a great deal of the loose soil, which had rolled down into the roadway.

With great boldness the men rushed up the bank into the meadow.

But here all was still.

So dark, too, was it, that they could see nowhere beyond the sphere of light which was cast by the lanterns they carried.

The clouds, however, were fitting across the moon, and presently her light broke forth in all its glorious effulgence.

It seemed to have the effect of extinguishing the light of the lanterns, which now looked only like so many stars.

The men embraced the opportunity to look about them. Ejaculations of anger broke from their lips.

At the farthest extremity of the meadow could be seen a mounted man, who was urging his horse to make its utmost speed.

They saw it but for a moment, and then it disappeared.

Under the impulse of the moment, they rushed forward at full speed, but they soon checked themselves when they saw the utter futility of their attempt to overtake a horseman going at such a speed.

But they hastened back to the hall for horses and further assistance, as they were determined not to let the murderer escape if possible.

The reader scarcely requires to be told that the rider they saw in the distance was no other than Tom King.

He had lingered behind the hedge, and heard and saw all that we have described.

He did not attempt to move, indeed until he heard the men announce their intention of searching for him.

He then judged it high time to be off, so he mounted noiselessly, and led his steed away from the spot at a gentle rate, so as not to attract notice.

As soon as he was far enough off, however, he plunged his spurs deep into his horse's sides.

The poor creature flew over the level meadow with maddened bounds.

From time to time Tom looked back upon the road he had just come, and, as he did so, he noticed that, in the far distance, he could see the twinkling of lights.

There was a low hedge before him, and over this he leaped.

This will account for his sudden disappearance from the gaze of the men.

He alighted in another meadow, but as now he had nothing to fear from a pursuit, he allowed his horse to go at a more gentle rate.

He changed his course slightly, and then directed his steed over fields, and streams, and hedges, taking an almost straight line to his destination.

CHAPTER CCCCIX.

TOM KING SURPRISES DICK TURPIN BY HIS AGITATION AND HORROR.

It was nearly half an hour after this that a horseman, whose steed showed palpable signs of exhaustion and fatigue, trotted leisurely up to the gateway that led to the stables belonging to the "Mountain Rill" inn.

The hour was by no means a late one, and from several windows in the little roadside public-house came long, bright beams of light.

The horseman seemed to be well acquainted with the premises.

He glanced up to the old-fashioned bow-window on the first floor, and saw the dusky figure of some person standing at it.

He just waved his hand in token of recognition, and then he guided his horse underneath the archway.

In another moment he was in the yard at the rear of the inn.

A door was abruptly opened, and an elfish-looking lad appeared upon the threshold.

In his hand he held a lantern, the door of which was opened, in order that it should give a better light.

Behind him could be seen the figure of a man.

It was the ostler.

The liberal manner in which Tom King had behaved to him was not without exercising a sensible effect upon him.

He had sat on a corn-bin near the stable door during the whole period of Tom's absence, listening attentively for any sounds that would indicate his approach.

The reader will scarcely need to be told that the horseman who had just arrived was no other than our old friend Tom King.

He had seen nothing more of the domestics who commenced a pursuit after him; but, nevertheless, he made his way to the inn at full speed, for he was well aware that there was no time to lose.

Not only that Turpin would grow uneasy if he was long absent.

Tom dismounted rapidly from his steed, and gave his instructions to the ostler as to how the horse was to be treated.

The fellow promised implicit obedience to all his commands, but Tom would not allow himself to rest contented with the assurance merely, and though he had tolerably good faith in this ostler, he, nevertheless, waited and saw

everything done, although he was impatient in the extreme to rejoin Dick.

It was while he was thus occupied that Timothy Goodridge, the landlord, made his appearance.

In a smiling, jovial, off-hand sort of way, he stepped up close to where Tom King was standing.

"Ahem!" he said. "I see you are back again, sir."

"Yes," replied Tom, who by no means desired to encourage the landlord in his loquacity, "I have come back."

"Quite glad to see you back safe so soon," continued the landlord, not checked in the least. "I am very glad to see you safe back again. Your horse looks tired. Has he been far, sir?"

"Pretty well."

"Ah! I thought so. You have come fast, too. I can see that. Really, it is not the thing to compliment anyone to their face, and it is a thing which I am not at all in the habit of doing; but, sir, you are a magnificent rider. I was standing at the front door when you started, and really, you sat in the saddle as though it was your cradle, and you had never been out of it all your life. Perhaps you have been in the habit of riding, sir?"

"Oh! yes, occasionally."

"Occasionally? Well, really now, do you know I should have thought, from seeing you, that you were in continual practice. You seemed so much at home."

"I am glad my riding has pleased you," said Tom, dryly. "I wish you could say the same thing to me about your talkativeness."

This was an oblique hint, but the landlord either did not or would not take it, but continued to gabble on in the same strain, his object evidently being to extract from Tom all the information he could.

But he found that Tom was not very easily pumped; and, when he had finished, he was not much wiser than he was before.

In his present frame of mind, this garrulity upon the part of the landlord was excessively distasteful to Tom, but he had no means of escaping the infliction.

He was compelled to listen to all.

The ostler, however, was very nimble; and, in much less time than Tom King believed was possible, he thoroughly groomed the horse, and turned it into the stable.

Tom King did not leave until he had superintended the feeding.

Then, gladly enough, he turned away, for he was thoroughly wearied with the landlord's inquisitive questions.

He was so good-tempered, and said everything with such apparent frankness and goodwill, that Tom found it impossible to offend him.

At length, however, when he had seen all was properly done, our old friend directed his steps towards the inn.

He was sure Dick had seen him arrive, and he was rather surprised that he had not ere this made his appearance, but he hoped that he should have a reason given for it.

The landlord would insist upon accompanying him to the door of the room, though Tom did all he could to prevent him.

Finding his efforts ineffectual, however, he was compelled to submit, and get rid of him only when he entered the room.

Turpin advanced eagerly towards him, but, by a look, Tom cautioned him not to speak until the landlord had withdrawn.

This Mr. Goodridge was reluctantly compelled to do, for he had no excuse whatever for remaining.

Mand was seated near the fire, and her face lighted up with joy when she saw Dick's faithful comrade had returned unhurt and in safety from his perilous expedition.

She noticed in a moment, however, the peculiar expression of his countenance, and wondered what could have caused it.

She fancied it might proceed from having failed to accomplish his purpose, but in this she was mistaken.

Dick Turpin noticed the strange, wild, haggard look upon his comrade's face, and would have spoken had not Tom placed his finger on his lip, as a signal for him to remain silent.

At the same time he took our hero by the hand, and, leading him up to the window, he said in a faint whisper—

"Do not raise your voice. The landlord's suspicions are, I am sure, aroused, by the questions he has just put to me."

"Has he been questioning you, then?"

"Yes, while I have been looking after my horse. Why did you not come down?"

"Because Mand did not wish to be left, and because I was undesirous of doing anything to further rouse the landlord's curiosity."

"It was as well, perhaps. You saw me arrive?"

"Yes; I have been watching at the window, here, nearly ever since your departure—not merely for your return, but to guard against being surprised by our foes."

"A wise precaution—a very wise precaution indeed, and we shall do well to continue to adopt it."

"Good. We will stand here and talk. But Tom, my friend, speak—tell me what has happened. Why do you look so strangely? Your face is ghastly white, and your eyes roll fearfully in their sockets. Do not keep me any longer in suspense. Speak! Tell me all. I am sure something terrible has happened."

"Hush!" said Tom, in a low but impressive whisper, casting his eyes all around him. "Hush!"

"This mysterious behaviour fills me with unknown dread," said Turpin, clutching his comrade tightly by the arm. "Answer my questions—relieve my uneasiness, I beg you."

"Be calm, and I will tell you all."

"Are our foes at hand?"

"No—no. I believe not—at least, not to my knowledge."

"You have failed, then, in your enterprise?"

"No—no; I have not failed. Look here. This bag contains gold to a large amount, and this pocket-book, bank-notes."

As he spoke these words, Tom King, not without a certain wildness of manner which much alarmed his comrade, produced from his pocket the articles he had named, and thrust them hurriedly into Dick's hands.

"What, then, is the meaning of your agitation, my friend?" he asked.

"I have had an adventure."

"An adventure?"

"Yes; one of such a fearful character that I have never had before, and I hope and trust I never shall again."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Turpin. "Speak—speak no longer in these ambiguous terms, but explain yourself. Tell me what has happened."

"Patience—patience, and I will do so. I have not yet been able to overcome my horror; indeed now I reflect on what has occurred, it seems to redouble in intensity."

"Calm yourself—calm yourself, I pray!"

"You forget my caution. The landlord may be at the door listening, and should he overhear our conversation, we are lost."

"I will be careful. But tell me, I pray, what has taken place?"

"I will do so as briefly as I can. Listen!"

As he spoke, Tom drew Dick close to him, and inclined his mouth to his ear.

"I would not have Mand hear what I am about to communicate for worlds," he whispered; "so listen."

"I am listening," said Dick. "I am quite at a loss to think what can have occurred to have produced such an effect upon you. Your nerves are well strung. It cannot be a trifle which has so overcome you."

"It is no trifle, as you will say when you have heard me out. This is what has taken place—this is what has filled my very soul with horror and thrown me into this state of agitation."

Tom King then related to Turpin his adventure, which we have already placed in full before the reader, and, therefore, there is no need of ours to repeat it in his own words.

He had not exaggerated its horror.

Well might he utter the wish that such an adventure should never again befall him.

"To think, Dick," he added, in conclusion, "that, unaware of it, I for so long pursued a dying, perhaps a dead man! By what mysterious means he contrived to retain his seat in the saddle, I know not, for his steed's speed was tremendous. I do not for a moment believe that he guided the animal to its destination. I believe the animal

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carried him home by the mere force of its own instinct, and doubtless it would have carried him still nearer to his house had not the iron gates shown themselves to be an obstacle which he could not surmount."

"It is very terrible," said Dick; "but you take this too much to heart. The fault is not so much yours as his. Had he complied with your demands, he would have been unhurt."

"True, true. He wished to preserve his life and money."

"And so he lost both. Tom this is really not so terrible as you seem to think it. Had he fallen anywhere save at the gates of his own park, you would not have thought it half so dreadful."

"Perhaps not. It would, however, have been better for my future peace of mind if I had not stayed to witness the finding of the body. I ought to have fled from the spot, but, as it was, I witnessed all—all! Never until my last moment shall I forget the terrible scene."

"Come, come," said Dick, anxious to rouse his comrade from this depressed state of mind. "Shake off these feelings; they are unworthy of you—they are unworthy of anyone. What took place was clearly an accident. You did not aim the bullet, although it struck a fatal blow. It was purely a chance shot. Do not take the event so much to heart, I beg. It is wrong of you to do so."

"Perhaps it is, Dick; perhaps it is. But had the need of money been any less urgent than it is, I should have turned and fled the moment I discovered the lifeless body in the lane. As it was, I robbed the dead!"

"And what of that? Why should you object to take that from his body while dead, which you would not have scrupled to take while living? Pho! pho! Where is the difference? Only in this. The dead man would not be sensible of his loss."

"It is well for you, Dick, to speak thus philosophically; but had it been you, I fancy you would have found the difference. It has given my nerves a shock such as they will be a long time recovering from. But come, let us quit this subject. We have other matters of much greater importance pressing upon us. This is the time for action, not for talk!"

"You are right, you are right; and I hope you are cool, calm, and collected enough to talk upon our future proceedings."

"I am, I am."

"What, then, are we to do?"

"Depart without delay."

"I think that will be the best plan. But stay. Tell me. I forgot to inquire before. While you have been out, have you seen or heard nothing of the dragons?"

"Nothing at all."

"Well, then, that is good news. It seems to promise us that we shall be able to leave this place without molestation from them."

"It does, indeed. I am surprised we have been so little troubled with them. I cannot make it out."

"It is strange."

"Very strange. I wonder how Claude and Sixteen-String Jack have fared. You have no idea how anxious I am about them. I cannot help thinking that the reason we have not seen the dragons, is that they are all in pursuit of them."

"Do not give way to such gloomy speculations as those, I beg. Let us prepare to start at once. As a preliminary step, we will call the landlord, pay the remainder of the money that is owing for the horse, and settle off the score."

"Pray do. Let us summon him at once. But, hark! Listen, Dick! What is that? Louder and louder! Plain and plainer it becomes! What is it? I am afraid to say!"

"Be calm," said Turpin. "You do not seem yourself."

"Can you hear nothing?"

"I hear the trampling of many horses' hoofs."

"Yes—yes! That is the sound! We are lost! We have delayed our departure until it is too late! Hark! They are the dragons! By some means they have tracked us to this place! Look out—look out, and tell me what you see!"

THE DRAGONS HALT AT THE FRONT DOOR OF THE "MOUNTAIN RILL" INN, AND THE POSITION OF THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN BECOMES CRITICAL TO A DEGREE.

DURING the time that Tom King related to Dick the particulars of his terrible adventure on the highway, Maud had retained her seat near the fire.

Her eyes were directed towards both, but their forms were partially concealed by the gloom of the chamber and the dingy curtain which hung before the window.

Where she sat she could only hear the murmuring of voices, but could not detect a word, except on those occasions when Dick spoke, when he was immediately cautioned by his comrade to lower his tone.

It was well for our friends that they were thus prudent. Tom King had good reason to fear the landlord's curiosity.

At that very moment he was crouching down upon the stairs with his ear close to the bottom of the door, between which and the floor there was a space of nearly half an inch, for the door was an old one, and now fitted very badly.

If Maud, sitting by the fireside, could not hear what Tom King said, it is quite certain the landlord could not, and so he had all his pains for nothing.

He heard a confused, murmuring sound, but that was all.

When, however, Tom King spoke the words with which the preceding chapter concluded, she could tell, not only by the disjointed syllables which fell upon her ears, but by the excited manner in which they were uttered, that something wrong had taken place.

Ever on the look-out for danger, and apprehensive of every circumstance, Maud sprang in a moment from her seat, and hastened towards the window.

She clasped her arms around Dick, as she said, in fearful accents—

"What is amiss? Tell me—oh! tell me at once what is amiss."

"Hush! hush! Maud. Be not alarmed; it may be nothing. We can but prepare ourselves for the worst. Let us hope that the danger with which we are threatened will pass away."

Maud clung still more tightly to Dick Turpin, as he spoke these words, for she knew they foreboded peril.

In the meantime, Tom King had taken the two candles off the table, and placed them in one corner of the room, so that none of the rays of light from them should fall upon the window.

This would enable them to look out without so much danger of being seen by those who were approaching.

When first the quick ear of Tom King detected the sounds of horses' hoofs, they must have been a long way off.

Now, however, they were close at hand.

Anxiously the three fugitives crowded in the space of the old bow-window, and looked down the road.

It was dark without; and yet through the obscurity they could distinguish a dark mass approaching in various portions, of which something glittered brightly.

That peculiar, jingling sound which is ever heard when soldiers are on horseback, reached their ears.

That it was the dragons who were approaching there could be little or no doubt, and yet the danger of their presence might be less than it appeared to be.

They might be possibly doing no more than patrolling the road, and, if so, the best thing for our friends to do would be to remain perfectly still where they were, since any hasty movement to escape might have only the effect of bringing immediate destruction upon them.

In the hope, then, that the dragons who were approaching would pass the house, our friends stood at the window, looking out eagerly into the darkness.

On they came; the trampling of the horses' feet and the jingling of the accoutrements sounding plainer and plainer each moment.

Their speed did not relax.

On they came, and the hope that they would pass by and leave them in safety grew stronger and stronger in their breasts.

The approaching troop was a large one; the largest our friends had ever seen.

It seemed almost as though the numerous small bodies

of soldiers that had been hanging about had collected into a mob.

If this was so, and if they would only pass the inn, then all would be well.

The circumstance would turn out a most favourable one for our friends.

Nothing would be easier than for them to take their departure as soon as the dragoons were out of sight, and go in a direction contrary to them.

Here every step they took would increase the distance between them, and conduce to their safety.

On the other hand, should the dragoons have by some means or other traced them to the "Mountain Rill," and made an attack upon them, their position would be one of the most imminent and deadly peril.

The circumstance of the dragoons having combined together in such a large number, seemed quite in accordance with this latter supposition.

It would account for such a thing at once, because they would consider by appearing in such great force they would be able to make sure of the victory.

Such were the reflections that swept through the minds of both the highwaymen with the rapidity of thought.

They did not speak to each other, or communicate their ideas, but both coincided in a remarkable manner.

They felt that their fate would depend upon the occurrences of the next few moments, and, therefore, the reader will easily be able to imagine for himself the suspenseful anxiety with which they watched the approaching troop.

Their lives and liberties depended upon whether they passed by or whether they stopped.

As they came nearer and nearer, so did their suspense increase.

At one moment hope would maintain the ascendancy; at the next, fear and despair.

Fortunately for them, their suspense was not of very long duration.

The dragoons came on at a slow, joggling trot, such as is peculiar to the military.

They were now within ten yards of the inn.

The critical moment had arrived.

Would they pause?

No, they kept on at the same steady rate.

Hopeful and more hopeful grew our friends.

They ventured to breathe more freely.

The danger would pass by.

Another moment, and the danger would be over.

The dragoons will continue on their way.

No!

Suddenly—startlingly—there came upon the ears one word.

"Halt!"

That was the word.

It was uttered with that abruptness upon which military officers so pride themselves.

It was like the report of a pistol, and it seemed to produce upon our friends the same effect as a suddenly-delivered blow.

They staggered back, and a faint scream came from Maud's lips.

It was drowned by the noise made by the soldiers reining in their steeds.

In an incredibly short space of time all were still.

Turpin and King had not moved from the window.

They seemed incapable of motion.

The dragoons halted immediately beneath them.

That is to say, at the door of the public-house.

"All is lost," said Maud, moaningly, with her face blanched by terror. "All is lost."

The despondent words were echoed by the hearts of her two companions, but not by their lips.

But the sound of her voice seemed to have the effect of rousing them into action.

Rapidly both withdrew from the window, where there was so much hazard of their being seen, so that the dragoons were so close at hand.

Up the rooms on the ground-floor of the "Mountain Rill," and low ceilings, and as the soldiers sat on horseback, they almost reach to look into the bow-window.

Turpin and Dick paused near the centre of the room.

By common consent they looked at the priming of their weapons.

"What must be done now, Dick?" asked Tom King.

"Something, and that right quickly," was the reply.

"But what?"

"We must not remain here, or we shall be taken prisoners."

"Where can we go? If we descend the stairs we shall be detected immediately."

"The landlord's suspicions are aroused, and if the dragoons do not know already that we are here, they will ask the landlord, and he will recognise the description, and then all will be over with us."

"Our position is truly desperate, and unless we adopt some desperate expedient, it will be all over with us."

"We must escape! We must leave this place at once!"

"But how?—that is the question."

"We must think—ah! an idea. Come, I believe there is hope yet."

As he spoke these words, Turpin passed his arm round Maud's waist, and led her towards the door.

"What are you about to do?"

"Follow us, and you will see," said Turpin. "It will be better than for me to stop and explain it."

Turpin had recollected all in a moment that the room which Maud had occupied was in the rear of the house, and that the window overlooked the stable-yard.

Towards this he made his way.

He crossed the landing, and entered the chamber.

As he did so, he called out to Tom King, who was close at his heels, to secure the door.

He was instantly obeyed.

All would now depend upon the speed they were able to make.

Turpin opened the window.

It was a large casement, and the leaf swung back suddenly against the wall.

"Joe—Joe," he cried. "Here."

"Let me call him," said Tom King. "I am on good terms with him."

"Do not speak too loud."

Tom called, but there was no response for a moment.

"What do you want with him?" asked King.

"To bring a ladder and place it against the window. We shall then be able to descend into the yard, and, perhaps, steal away unperceived."

"An excellent thought. But the ostler, I fear, is out in the front attending to the soldiers' horses."

"I forgot that."

"Never mind," continued Tom King; "the distance to the ground is not so great but what I can drop it easily. Then, if there is a ladder, I will place it for you."

"Stop," exclaimed Turpin; "what is that?"

He pointed to a dark figure standing in the yard as he spoke.

"It is the ostler!" ejaculated Tom King. "Ah! is well."

Dick called him again.

"Here I is," said a voice, which Tom instantly recognised as the ostler's. "Where be you?"

"Here, at the window."

"Oh! I see you. What do you want?"

"Joe, if you want to earn five pounds, listen to me, and do just as I tell you."

"Oh! won't I?" said Joe, as he came nearer. "What do you want?"

"A ladder! Quick! In an instant! Place it against the window!"

"Ain't got never a one."

"No ladder?"

"No; but here's some steps."

"Put them here."

"They ain't tall enough."

"Never mind; we will try to make them do."

The ostler did not waste any more time in argument, but produced the steps he had mentioned, and placed them where Dick had directed.

They were manifestly too short, but yet our friends thought they would answer the purpose.

Tom King slipped through the window, and lowered himself until his feet touched them.

Then, taking a firm foot-hold, he asked Dick to hand Maud down, and he would assist her to descend.

At the same time he turned round to the ostler, and said—

"Run into the stable and saddle our two horses as quickly as you can, and put the side-saddle on the horse we bought to-day of your master. Be quick, and you shall have not five pounds but ten!"



DICK TURPIN, MAUD, AND TOM KING ARRIVE AT THE RUINED MANSION.

The offer of this immense sum seemed for a moment or two to have a paralyzing effect upon the ostler, but, quickly recovering himself, he rushed into the stable, and began saddling the horses with maniacal speed.

He was used to his trade, and soon performed the duty.

In the meantime, in obedience to his friend's injunction, Dick Turpin assisted Maud through the window, and Tom, standing on the steps, helped her down.

She reached the ground safely and easily.

For Turpin to follow was an easy enough matter.

In fact, he almost disdained to make use of the steps at all.

So now, then, all was well, and with renewed hope they hurried across the yard into the stable.

Their satisfaction may be imagined when they saw the wonderful progress which the ostler had made in caparisoning the steeds.

Both highwaymen sprang forward to his assistance, and, in less than a moment more, all were ready.

They mounted in the stable.

But their difficulties were far from being over.

So far as their own knowledge extended, there was but one means by which the yard could be entered and left, and this was by means of the gateway.

Round this the troop of dragoons were clustered, so that it seemed absolutely impossible for them to emerge, without being captured, and, if they remained in the yard, the same event would take place.

This was a dilemma truly.

They appealed to the ostler, who was, indeed, their only remaining hope.

"Quick, tell me," said Turpin; "is there any other means by which this yard can be left besides by the gateway?"

"No, that is the only one."

"Are you sure?"

"In course I is."

Our friends were in despair.

"But is there no place in the yard where the wall is so low that we could jump over it into the meadows or some thing?"

"No, but I'll tell you what there is."

"What?"

"A little door that leads into the paddock."

"The paddock?"

"Yes, that is where we turn the horses in to graze; it is just at the back of the stable."

"The very thing. But where is the door?"

"I'll show you. Follow me."

"We will, never fear; but pray be quick, as our lives are in danger."

The ostler ran out into the yard, and our friends followed him.

They walked their horses, but even then they could not help making a slight noise, which they were fearful would reach the ears of the dragoons.

Their fear was realized.

They heard a loud shout, which came from the direction of the gateway, and then a prodigious clattering of horses' hoofs on the rough stones with which it was paved.

Our friends heeded it not, but bent upon the ostler the whole of their attention.

He ran swiftly across the yard, and opened a small door in the wall.

"Through there," he cried. "You must stoop, or you will break your heads."

The caution was a necessary one.

Maud and Turpin passed through first.

Tom King followed, and, as did so, thrust a handful of grasses into the ostler's hand.

"Thank you, sir," he said. "Keep right straight across the paddock, and you will come to a bit of a fence. Jump that, and you will be in Throttle Goose-lane."

"Thanks!" said Tom. "Close the door after me; and, if you can, send the dragoons off upon a false scent."

CHAPTER CCCCXI.

SHOWS HOW TIMOTHY GOODRIDGE, THE LANDLORD, WAS OF GREAT SERVICE TO THE HIGHWAYMEN WITHOUT KNOWING IT.

TOM KING did not wait to hear the ostler's reply; indeed, he did not know whether he made any, for, as he spoke, he stooped and urged his horse forward.

In a moment he was through the narrow portal and out into the paddock.

He saw two dim figures before him, and halted.

They were Turpin and Maud.

"On—on!" he cried; "on for your lives! Keep straight across the place, and then we shall come to a hedge, on the other side of which is a country lane. On—on!"

Turpin did not need much urging.

He took hold of the bridle of Maud's steed, and followed Tom King, who took upon himself to lead the way to the hedge of which he had spoken.

Here we must, for a moment, leave them, in order to give an account of the proceedings of the dragoons.

Already we have seen how they came up in rather strong numbers to the door of the "Mountain Rill" inn.

They were the very same troop that had made the attack upon the highwaymen in Eusfield Chase, and drove them from that comfortable place of shelter.

From time to time they had been reinforced by other detachments they had met with upon the road, and so their number became greatly swelled; for as soon as the other dragoons heard that the game had been fairly started, they were eager in the extreme to join in the pursuit.

However, they had lost the scent, and, in spite of all their efforts, they could not find it again.

But they had persevered untiringly, for they were convinced that in the end they must come up with the object of their search.

In this manner, the whole of the day was spent, which the highwaymen passed so snugly at the inn, and so, too, they spent the night that followed, until they arrived in the manner we have related.

The reader will bear in mind that Tom King and Dick, as they stood watching the soldiers approach, were uncon-

tain, up to the last moment, whether they were going to stay or continue on their journey.

This inability of theirs to decide is easily accounted for.

The officer in command of the dragoons had no intention of halting at the "Mountain Rill" inn until just as he came in sight of it.

Seeing the inn reminded him that he stood greatly in need of refreshment, and no doubt his men were in the same predicament, for they had not quitted the saddle for many hours.

The horses, too, would be all the better able to perform their service if they had a bait; and so all at once the officer cried out, "Halt!" no less to the surprise than to the satisfaction of his men.

They pulled up with military promptitude, and sat still, waiting for further commands.

From this it will be seen that the dragoons had no idea that those of whom they were in search had taken up their quarters at this very identical place, so that the alarm of our friends was somewhat premature and unnecessary.

It was well, however, that they took the prompt steps they did to leave the place, as the sequel will prove.

Had they known that the soldiers had no suspicion of their presence there, they might have been tempted to remain.

Lucky, however, was it for them that they did not.

Had they lingered, the worst and most disastrous consequences might have ensued.

Upon hearing such a tremendous clattering of hoofs before his door, of course the inquisitive landlord left off in the midst of what he was doing, and hurried to the front of the house to learn what had taken place.

His surprise was not so great as might have been expected, for he was aware that for some time past the roads had been patrolled by detachments of dragoons; nor was it the first time they had made a temporary halt before his door.

He was glad enough to see them, and, in a bustling and obsequious way, ran up to the officer's horse.

"This is the 'Mountain Rill' inn," he said, "and I am the landlord, Timothy Goodridge, as you would see on the sign. If it was only a little lighter, there is the best of accommodation for man and beast."

"Of course, of course, every landlord says that," replied the officer.

"You will find that I don't say it without good cause," replied Mr. Goodridge. "Will you alight, gentlemen, or—"

"Stop a moment," said the officer, who was struck with a fresh thought. "I have a question to ask you."

The landlord assumed an expression of great importance, and prepared to listen.

"I believe," said the officer, "that you are a man who generally takes notice of all that takes place around you, especially if it is of an extraordinary or unusual character?"

"Well, yes; I generally keep my eyes open as to what is going on in the world."

"Just so, I expected as much, and so I went to ask you a question."

"I shall be glad to answer it if I have the power."

"If you possess the information we require, you will find that it will answer your purpose to place us in possession of it."

The landlord brightened up, and impatiently waited for more.

"You must know that we are on the look-out for five persons, four of whom we very much desire to capture. Now, have you seen anything of them? Can you give us any information respecting them?"

"No," replied Mr. Goodridge.

"You have not seen them, then?"

"Not as I know of, but—"

"But what?" asked the officer, quickly, whose hopes of learning something had revived.

"You haven't given me any sort of description of these five people, so I might have seen them and I might not."

"To be sure," said the officer, "I forgot that. Well, then, one of the five is a young and good-looking woman—girl, I might also say."

"Yes, yes."

"Have you seen her?"

"Go on—no one."

The officer then proceeded to give a brief description of the personal appearance of our four friends.

He concluded by saying—

"Now, Mr. Landlord, if you can give us any information about these individuals, or any of them, you will be entitled to a reward of a hundred pounds, which will be paid to you by the Secretary of State."

Mr. Goodridge gasped for breath, and then in a nervous sort of way he said—

"Ah! ah! I have—ah!—earn't it."

"What!" exclaimed the officer. "Speak, speak yourself. What do you mean by that?"

"I have earn't it," repeated the landlord; and as he spoke he pointed in a mysterious manner to the low window on the first floor.

The officer grew impatient.

"What is the meaning of all this mystery?" he said.

"Early this morning," said Mr. Goodridge, "two men, whose appearance corresponds exactly with the description given me, arrived here on horseback. One was on a beautiful black mare, which is in my stable now."

The officer uttered an ejaculation, and sprang from his horse.

"Listen to me," said Mr. Goodridge, placing his hand on the officer's arm. "Wait, and I will tell you more."

"Quick, then, be quick! There is no time to lose."

"It's all right," said the landlord.

"Besides these two that I have spoken of, there came a girl also, on foot, and they are now all three sitting comfortably enough in that room there. I left them in it when you arrived, and they have not come down, because yonder is the stairs, and we should have seen them if they had."

This intelligence for a moment or so evidently became the officer.

Then, in a hasty voice, he commanded a dozen of his men to alight from their steeds and follow him into the inn, while the others remained mounted and on the look-out, in case their prey should make a dash to escape, when they would be able to intercept them.

Under the guidance of the landlord, who was excited at the idea of earning a hundred pounds so easily, he made his way up the staircase with his dozen dragoons close at his heels.

Of course, Mr. Goodridge was the first to enter the room.

When he saw the door standing wide open, when he knew he had left it closed such a short time before, his heart misgave him.

Upon entering, his worst suspicions were confirmed.

It was tenantless.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "Gone! and all my money. Oh! I am a ruined man."

"How? what? gone?" said the officer, sharply.

"What is the meaning of all this? If you do not explain everything clearly and to my entire satisfaction, I shall take you into custody!"

At this moment a shout came to their ears.

It was uttered by the dragoons without.

It was immediately followed by the trampling of many horses' hoofs upon the stones within the gateway.

"Something has happened," exclaimed the officer, and, with breakneck precipitation, he and his men descended the stairs.

The meaning of the shout was simple enough.

Those dragoons who had been left outside to watch were thoroughly on the alert for any little circumstance that might take place.

All at once they heard the trampling of horses' feet in the yard behind the inn.

The sound was slight, but yet they heard it plainly.

It suggested in a moment the thought that their prey was making their escape, so, to attract the attention of their comrades within the inn, they called out and dashed down the archway.

We must now once more, and for the last time, step back, and then all will be clear enough.

We have now explained how it was that our friends had sufficient time to make their escape into the yard, saddle their steeds, mount, and be off; and now we have to describe the proceedings of the ostler, who had the utmost inclination to serve those people in every way he could who had behaved so liberally to him.

It will be recollected that when our friends first called

to him out of the window, he appeared to be out of sight and hearing, but almost immediately they saw a dark figure emerge from the gateway into the yard.

Tom recognised it in a moment as the ostler.

The reader must not suppose that Joe heard them the first time they called.

His presence in the yard was not in any way attributable to that.

Hearing the dragoons ride up to the door, he had hastily slipped on his clothes—for he had retired to rest some time ago—and made his way to the front of the inn, in order to see whether his services were required.

He had just come back to fetch a truss of hay and some water for the dragoons' horses, when our friends saw him and called out to him.

What afterwards took place we know.

The ostler, of course, preferred to attend upon our friends than on the dragoons, for he knew by experience that he was not likely to get much out of the latter.

No sooner had Tom King passed through the narrow door in the wall leading into the paddock, than he closed it after him and bolted it, muttering as he did so—

"I'll serve you all I can, blest if I won't."

The dragoons, however, were close at hand; but, from the darkness which prevailed in the yard, they had not been able to see where our friends were; besides which, the door was situated in a distant corner, the route to which was rather intricate, for the yard, like most old-fashioned inn-yards, was piled up with lumber.

The dragoons could hear no longer the sound of horses' hoofs, which had at first attracted their attention; for, of course, as soon as our friends gained the soft turf in the paddock, their horses' footsteps became inaudible.

The dragoons called loudly for lights, and dismounted, for they found the task of searching the inn-yard whilst mounted to be impossible.

The ostler, having closed the door, began to consider what would be the best thing he should do.

He feared, and not without reason, that he would be suspected of having aided the escape of the guilty parties, and he was apprehensive of the consequences of such suspicion.

What should he do?

He had but scant time for consideration, and, naturally enough, the first thought that suggested itself to him was that he should hide himself.

As a matter of course, the ostler was perfectly familiar with the inn-yard and everything it contained, having spent the greater part of his life in it.

Glancing round him, then, as well as the darkness would allow, he saw a large butt, which he remembered was empty.

This seemed a capital hiding-place, and, without further reflection, he climbed up, with the agility of a monkey, and lowered himself into it.

He did not think of the consequences of what he had done.

Should he be found, suspicion would be directed towards him with ten times greater strength than before. He never thought of this, however.

His mind was fully occupied in felicitating itself upon its cleverness in devising such a capital place of concealment.

But he got into the butt only just in time.

The other dragoons, as well as the landlord, many of them carrying lights, made their appearance in the yard, and an active search at once commenced.

The landlord was furious to a degree.

In the first place, he called upon Joe, the ostler, in a voice of thunder.

Joe heard him, but he had too much prudence to reply,

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOE, THE OSTLER, IS DISCOVERED BY THE DRAGOONS, AND HAS A NARROW ESCAPE.

All he did was to crouch down still lower in the butt, or, though, by that means, he could more effectually conceal himself, while he strained his sense of hearing to the utmost, in order to learn, if possible, whether he was in any danger.

Mr. Goodridge was quite surprised when he found that the ostler did not respond to his call, but, nevertheless, he

made his way into the stables, the door of which was winging wide open.

A cry of anger and horror came from the landlord's lips as soon as he entered, and he danced about in the most frantic manner imaginable, to the infinite amusement and astonishment of the dragoons, who had no idea what it meant.

The stable was empty.

At a glance, Mr. Goodridge saw that not only were the two steeds belonging to the visitors gone, but also the one upon which he had only received a small sum on account of the purchase of.

Curse, both loud and deep, issued from his lips. and once more he called frantically upon the ostler.

But, as before, he met with no response.

The officer in command strove to arrive at some conclusion from the landlord, but at last he was compelled to give up the attempt in despair, for Mr. Goodridge did nothing but curse and swear.

"Search the yard," cried the officer. "Search the yard. They are somewhere close at hand I feel confident. Search all around."

The dragoons dispersed themselves immediately over the yard, and, assisted by the lights, which were carried by many of them, they proceeded to make an examination of the whole of the premises.

Before they had done much, the landlord recovered the use of his senses sufficiently to cease cursing and swearing in the stable, and he came outside looking and behaving more like a rational creature than he had recently done.

"We heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard here," said one of the dragoons, addressing his superior officer, "but we can see nothing of them."

"They did not pass out of the gateway?"

"Certainly not. They could not have done so without being seen and captured by us."

Mr. Goodridge was standing close by, and so turning to him the officer said—

"Now, landlord, can you help us out of this difficulty? Is there another way out of your yard, or is there some place where these fellows may have concealed themselves?"

The landlord rubbed his head perplexedly, and then he said—

"Curse that Joe! I know d—d well he is at the bottom of it."

"So I am," muttered Joe, as he heard the remark, for he thought his master alluded to the butt, having only imperfectly heard the preceding sentences. "I wonder how he knew that. It's all up now, I suppose."

Nevertheless, Joe, the ostler, had the prudence not to make the least movement.

"Who's Joe?" asked the dragoon, impatiently. "Why don't you answer my questions at once, when you know how important it is that we should not lose a moment?"

"I tell you, Joe's at the bottom of it," said the landlord again.

The ostler groaned slightly.

"Oh! lauks," he said, "it is quite certain that master knows where I be, and I expects they'll have me out pretty quick."

"Who's Joe?"

"He's the ostler. I know as well as if I had seen him, that he has shown these fellows the little door in the wall that leads into the paddock, and"—

"What, wretch!" cried the officer in a towering passion, and clutching the landlord by the throat as he spoke. "What, villain! Do you mean to tell me that there is another means of leaving the yard?"

The landlord nodded desperately.

Speak he could not, for the hold which the officer kept upon his throat made utterance an impossibility.

"It's all up, then," said the officer, as he released his hold.

Mr. Goodridge coughed violently, and then he cried—

"I know he's done it; and if he has, they're far enough off by this time, you may depend."

It was now the officer's turn to swear, and it was soon evident that he was quite as well skilled in this accomplishment as the landlord himself.

"This is all your fault," he said. "D—d if I don't believe you're to league with them! I'll take you into custody."

"It's Joe," said Mr. Goodridge; "I know it's Joe!"

How could it be me? I have been with you all the while, but he has been aiding them to escape."

"Where is Joe?" cried the officer. "Who has seen him?"

The unfortunate ostler, "distilled almost to a jelly by the act of fear," heard every word of the foregoing conversation.

Affairs had taken a very unpleasant turn, and he found his situation in the empty water-butt not half so comfortable as he had thought it.

"I will try to be off," he said to himself. "Master knows where I be, and he will tell the sojers. I'll cut, or they'll lock me up; for if I stay here, they will have me sure enough."

Now this was about the most unwise resolution that Joe, the ostler, could possibly have come to; for, if he had remained where he was, there was just a chance that he would not be discovered.

But, as we have seen, he was under the impression that his master was, by some means, acquainted with his hiding-place, so it was not safe, of course, to remain there any longer.

Cautiously and slowly, so as not to make the least noise, Joe, the ostler, rose to his feet.

He was then just able to see over the top of the water butt.

The inn-yard was tolerably well illuminated with the lights the soldiers carried.

He saw them standing close to the butt.

The landlord was showing them the door that led into the paddock.

The bolt was drawn instantly.

Their backs were towards the butt, and Joe thought this was the favourable moment to leave it.

He drew himself up without being either seen or heard, for the dragoons were wholly occupied by the discovery of the door and attending to the orders of their superior officer, who, having once more got upon the track of the highwaymen, resolved to renew the pursuit without delay.

It thus happened that the slight noise which the ostler could not help making, was unheeded, and he, at length, gained the summit of the wall in safety, which was only a few inches above the top of the water-butt.

But the success which had hitherto attended him, now deserted him.

The top of the wall was crumbling and decayed, and portions of it came away and rolled down into the yard.

This was a circumstance which could not fail to instantly attract the notice of the dragoons.

They looked up by common consent, and they saw Mr. Joe on the top of the wall, looking the very picture of dismay.

"Present arms!" said the officer to his men, with startling abruptness.

He was obeyed instantly.

Then, turning to Joe, he said—

"Descend this moment, or you are a dead man."

The ostler glanced at the glittering barrels of the carbines presented to him.

That was enough.

As though he had been shot, he rolled off the wall.

But he took good care to fall into the paddock.

The dragoons darted through the door in a moment, and seized him ere he could rise to his feet and make a run for it, as he fully intended.

Trembling in every limb, and in a most unsavoury condition—for he had fallen into a dung-pit—he was led to the commanding officer, who looked at him sternly, while he said to the soldiers—

"Hold him firmly, my men; see that he does not escape."

The dragoons tightened their hold.

"So it is you, is it," said the officer, "who assisted the highwaymen to escape? Do you know you will be transported for life for it?"

At this terrible announcement Joe's knees knocked together, and he would have sunk to the ground had he not been held up by the firm grasp of his captors.

His teeth chattered, and his eyes rolled wildly as he looked from one to the other of the stern faces which surrounded him.

"Speak," said the officer, "speak."

The unfortunate ostler made several attempts to do so, but failed.

"You admit your guilt, then?" continued the officer. "You confess that you assisted the highwaymen to escape?"

A ray of hope at this moment flashed across the ostler's mind, and he recovered himself somewhat.

"I didn't know they were highwaymen," he said, with an effort.

"But you assisted them to escape?"

"I was obliged."

"How?"

"They clapped a pistol to my head, and swore they would blow my brains out if I said a word, or refused to do all that they told me; and for fear of my life I obeyed."

This sounded such a plausible excuse, that Joe began to pluck up his courage a little, and he ventured to indulge in the hope that his case was not quite so desperate as he had imagined it to be.

"Where have they gone? Tell me, and that at once!"

"They made me show them the door leading into the paddock, and then they bolted through it like winking."

"Which way did they go?"

"Across the paddock, I think."

"But what brought you on top of the wall?"

"I was trying to get away."

"What for?"

"I was afraid I should get into trouble for what I had done. But I could not help it. If I had not obeyed them, they would have blown my brains out."

"You are sure they went across the paddock?"

"Yes."

The officer reflected a moment.

He was not altogether pleased with Mr. Joe, and he had half a mind to take him prisoner, and the only reason he hesitated to do so was because he knew what an incumbrance he would be.

"Release him," he said to his men, as soon as he had finished his reflections.

Joe was accordingly set at liberty, to his no small gratification, as the reader will easily believe.

"We will waste no more time here," said the officer. "Mount, every one of you. We will renew the pursuit without further delay; but in giving my account of this matter, I shall not omit to state my suspicions both of you, Mr. Landlord, and you, Mr. Joe."

"I am sure I am not in the least to blame," said the landlord. "That's one drop more, however, to my cup of aggravation. I am suspected of aiding the escape of those rascals who have gone off with a horse that I could have got eighty guineas for to-morrow."

"Well—well, that may be; but I have my suspicions nevertheless. I can't help it. They may be unfounded. I don't say they are not."

"I ain't to blame," said Joe, who had grown bold with success. "You would have done as I did, if you had been placed in the same position."

"I have nothing to do with that," said the officer, as he glanced round to see whether his men were mounted. "Are all here?" he added.

"All—all."

"Follow me, then; and, though these villains have got such a long start of us, it will go hard with me if I don't capture them before daybreak. Now they are out of cover again, we won't rest until we have hunted them down."

As he uttered these words, in a very determined voice, the officer of dragoons directed his horse towards the little door.

"Mind your head," said Joe. "Stoop as you go out."

The officer was thankful for this caution, for he escaped a ugly blow in consequence of it, and he began to think better of Mr. Joe.

The same caution applied to the rest.

One by one they defiled through the narrow doorway, and, when all had gained the paddock, they set forward at a sharp trot.

Joe and the landlord watched them until they were out of sight, and then the former closed the door, and bolted it carefully.

With the landlord and the ostler we have now no more to do.

Other and more important events are pressing upon us for attention.

It is, however, certain that Joe reaped a great deal more

benefit from the highwaymen's visit than his master did, for he had upwards of ten pounds in his pocket, which, to one in his position in life, was an enormous sum, while the landlord had received nothing for the use of his rooms, the eatables and drinkables he had supplied, and the feeding of the horses.

All he had got was twenty guineas on account of the purchase of a horse, which he had refused fifty guineas for only the day before.

CHAPTER CCCXIII.

DICK TURPIN AND TOM KING HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY IN FINDING A PLACE OF SHELTER.

FROM what has just been related, the reader will perceive that Dick Turpin and Tom King had an excellent start of their pursuers.

Without meeting with the slightest molestation they crossed the paddock adjoining the inn, and quickly arrived at the hedge of which the ostler had spoken.

As he had truly said, it was a low one, and on the other side could be seen the country lane he had mentioned.

Tom King showed the example in leaping over it. "All is well," he cried encouragingly, as his horse alighted on the clayey ground. "There is excellent foothold."

These words were highly satisfactory to Turpin, who, nevertheless, turned towards his companion with great anxiety.

"Mand, dearest," he said, "do you think you could venture to take that leap in safety?"

"Oh! yes," was the reply, given in an encouraging tone of voice. "Do not be afraid."

As she spoke, Mand touched the horse lightly with the riding-whip.

He understood the signal, and, giving a spring, he cleared the obstruction with the greatest ease.

Mand was an excellent rider.

In former times it had been her chief delight, and scarcely a day passed without her indulging in this favourite exercise, for Squire Winberry had kept two beautiful steeds expressly for the use of Mand and Blanche.

A more formidable obstacle than the low hedge had many a time been cleared by this brave girl, and now she performed the feat to the infinite admiration of Turpin and King.

The former just pressed Black Bess upon the flank, and was by her side almost instantly.

"Which way shall we take, captain?" asked Tom King; "the right or the left? There is really no time to lose."

"Let us wait a moment," replied Dick. "Can you see anything of our pursuers?"

Both highwaymen looked in the direction they had just come.

They could see the inn, which was at no great distance, and the out-buildings attached to it, but not their foes.

"I cannot see them at all," said Tom King at length, in a tone of voice which fully expressed the amount of surprise he felt at this circumstance.

"Nor I," replied Dick. "It is very strange. I cannot make it out. When we passed through the door I thought they were close at our heels."

"They were not far behind us, that is certain," said Tom King; "but when I gave the ostler a trifle for his trouble, I asked him to send the dragoons off upon a false scent if he possibly could."

"It looks as though he had done it, too, Tom, for I cannot see them. It is quite certain they have not yet left the inn-yard."

"Let us hope, then, that they may be detained there a little longer, and improve this chance to the utmost. We shall get a good start of them, let things turn out how they may."

"Agreed. But it seems to me that if we turn to the left this lane will bring us out on to the high road again, and not far from the inn."

"I have no doubt of it," replied King, as he glanced keenly about him.

"That, then, is the road we ought of all others to avoid," continued Dick, "so we must turn to the right, and trust to our luck."

"To the right be it, then. Forward, Dick; I will bring

up the rear. I must say that at any time, when I am in doubt as to which way I ought to go, I would always take the right in preference to the left."

"It is to be hoped this will not take us wrong," said Turpin.

As he spoke, he once more took hold of the bridle of Maude's steed, and allowed Black Bess to proceed at an easy gallop, which was, however, in reality, little more than a canter.

This was the pace that would be least fatiguing to Maud, and it was for this sole reason that Turpin adopted it.

The horses, too, would be able to continue it for a long time without distress.

As he had promised, Tom King brought up the rear. He kept about twenty yards behind Maud and Dick, and every few moments he would look behind him, so as to become aware at the earliest moment when his enemies got upon their track.

But the night was a dark one, and the inn gradually faded from his sight, without his either seeing or hearing anything to excite his apprehension.

When he could see the inn no longer, and when he had convinced himself that the dragoons were not upon the road behind them, Tom increased his speed, and in another moment was riding abreast of Maud and Dick.

He lost no time in communicating the gratifying intelligence to them.

By Maud at least it was received with satisfaction.

Indeed, she could scarcely bring herself to believe that they had so completely escaped from a situation of so much peril.

But such was the case.

Nevertheless they did not reduce their speed, for they could not tell how soon their enemies might make their appearance, and the sooner they got out of that part of the country, the better it would be for their safety.

In this they at once agreed.

"We must not forget," said Turpin, "that we have yet a great deal to do. There is our appointment with Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack. We must not forget that."

"I had not forgotten it," replied Tom King; "tomorrow night we must be upon the agreed-on spot."

"In the meantime we must find some place of shelter; but where?"

"I think we cannot do better than occupy our minds with pondering upon this point. It is one of the utmost importance."

"It is, indeed."

"For my part, I think we cannot do better than spend the remainder of the night in journeying towards Finchley or Barnet, because the nearer we are to the spot where the meeting is to take place the better chance we shall have of keeping the appointment."

"Just so. Have you any idea how far we are off our destination?"

"None whatever."

"Nor I."

"This part of the country is almost wholly unknown to me, and I am not by any means certain whether we are not going away from Finchley instead of towards it."

"I hope not."

"It is a matter of the merest chance in the world, I can assure you."

"The best thing we can do, then, is to ascertain as soon as possible whereabouts we are."

"Undoubtedly; but I cannot exactly see how we are to do it."

"We must trust to chance."

"At any rate, it will not do for us either to pause or to change our course just at present."

"Very true. Forward, then. The night must be far advanced, and who can tell how far we may yet have to go?"

"I would give much to know what can be the reason we have not been troubled with the dragoons. That ostler must be a clever fellow to have kept them off our track."

"I wish I knew the reason of their non-appearance. As it is, I cannot help feeling mistrustful and suspicious about it."

"Pho—pho!"

In such-like talk as this did the two highwaymen beguile the tedium of their journey.

The lane which skirted the paddock belonging to the "Mountain Kill" led into another, and so on, and they had never once crossed or came in sight of a turnpike-road, which was a rather peculiar circumstance, and showed how little inhabited that part of the country was.

Up to the present moment the face of the heavens was covered with clouds, which had seemed stationary.

Now, however, a movement became perceptible; and it was evident that, ere long, the moon would break forth, for already her position in the sky was visible.

The highwaymen would much rather have dispensed with her light, as it might be the means of bringing them into danger, and yet, when the clear, pure light did break forth and bring into view the country round, they could not help experiencing a sensation of pleasure.

They were able to see the ground—the nature of the country through which they were travelling, as well as each other's faces.

This was a satisfaction to all.

The clouds now gave evident signs of completely dispersing before the slight wind which had sprung up, but the moon was verging towards the west, and would, ere long, sink beneath the horizon.

Suddenly a turn in the lane brought our friends to a spot where two other roads branched off at right angles to each other.

Which of these would have been best for them to pursue, our friends would have found it very difficult to determine, had they not caught sight of a finger-post, with three white, spectral-looking arms, which was planted just where the three roads joined.

By the distinctness with which this object was visible in the moonbeams, our friends fancied it had been recently painted.

"Now," said Tom King, with satisfaction perceptible in his tones, "we shall be able to learn at last whereabouts we are, and where we ought to go. Halt a moment, Dick; halt here underneath the shadow of this hedge, and I will ride forward and decipher, if I can, the words that are painted on yon finger-post."

"With all my heart," said Turpin, as he brought Black Bess and Maud's steed to a halt at the place which King had mentioned.

Tom now rode boldly enough into the triangular-shaped enclosure in which the finger-post was planted.

The three arms pointed, of course, in the direction of the three roads.

The one which pointed to whence they had just come, Tom took no notice of, but went up to the one on his right hand.

The letters were painted black upon it, and doubtless, in the daylight, were distinct enough, but by moonlight it was quite another matter.

Brightly as the beams had appeared to fall, Tom found, now that he was nearer, that they were sadly deficient in the defining quality.

However, he did not despair of being able to make out the inscription.

Riding as close to the finger-post as he could, he raised himself in the stirrups and caught hold of the projecting arm with one hand.

He was thus able to approach it very closely.

The first letters he was able to make out were those nearest his right hand.

They gave him but scant information.

"It's three and a-half miles to somewhere, Dick," he said, "but I'll be shot if I can make out where."

"Look again."

"I am. I can make out some more of the letters now. I can see 'n,' and 'o,' and 'th.' Ah! and here is 'r.' That makes North. It's three miles and a-half to some place beginning with North. What place can that be?"

"I cannot assist you, my friend," said Dick Turpin, "for I have no idea what part of the country we are in. There is a place called North Mimms."

"It can't be that," replied Tom King, "for there's only two more letters, and one of them is 'w.' And stop! the other is 'a.'"

"That seems an extraordinary name for a place. What do you call it?"

"I can see plain enough, now, and without being taken in the least. It is Northaw."

"Northaw?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever heard of such a place?"

"No."

"Have you?"

"No; and yet I think there is a village of that name some twenty miles north of London; but that can't be ear whereabouts, surely?"

"I'll look on the other arm that points the contrary way, and try whether I can make that out. If I can, I daresay we shall know better where we are."

Tom King, without more ado, turned his horse round and approached the other side of the finger-post.

"That ought to lead to London," said Turpin.

"Does it?"

"Wait a moment, and I will tell you. Yes, you are right. I can see the word London. Oh! yes; that is the way to London."

"How far does it say we are from it?"

"Why, I can't see very well, Dick; the figures seem blurred. Wait! It's six; no, it's sixteen miles to London."

"Then I was not far out, was I?"

"No; you were remarkably near the mark. Now, Dick, where are we to go? which way are we to go?"

"If we are to follow out your idea of finding a place of shelter, somewhere near the spot appointed for our meeting with Claude and Jack, we cannot do better than take the road towards London. I suppose it is about eight miles to Finchley?"

"Somewhere about that."

"Then let us take this road to London. Clearly it is not a highway—probably some cross-country road, and, therefore, we are not so likely to meet with any interruption."

"I agree with you entirely, Dick."

"Forward, then! There is no occasion to distress our cattle, and I think we may fairly congratulate ourselves upon having for the time being completely eluded our foes."

"I think so, too; but we must not feel too secure. We may be surprised, unless we keep continually on our guard."

"We must be cautious."

"We will not go quite so far as Finchley, Dick; and it would be better if we got somewhat to the west of it, as in that case we should be all the further from Enfield Chase."

"That is a good suggestion, and it shall be acted upon. It strikes me, after all the events that have recently taken place, that it will be a long time before it will be at all prudent for us to show ourselves in that part of the country again."

CHAPTER CCCXIV.

THE HIGHWAYMEN SUDDENLY CAME IN SIGHT OF AN UNEXPECTED SPECTACLE.

At a pace which did not distress their horses in the least, and which enabled the three friends to converse together without difficulty, they performed the remainder of the journey.

Tom's suggestion that they should go as far to the westward of the village of Finchley as possible, was a very wise one, and no better reason could be found for adopting this course than that which he himself gave.

They would be further from Enfield Chase, which was in the east, and, consequently, they would be less likely to encounter any of their foes, who would have no suspicion of their being in that part of the country.

At the first available turning, our friends struck off from the road they were pursuing, and directed their course as much due west as possible.

In this they were assisted greatly by the moon, which was just upon the point of declining behind the western horizon.

This was an excellent guide to them, and they experienced a feeling of great regret when the radiant orb entirely disappeared.

Luckily for them, this did not take place until they had gone a considerable distance, and it would now matter very little if they inclined slightly towards the south, for Finchley was some distance from them.

By the time the moon had sunk, there were somewhat indications in the opposite quarter of the heavens that dawn was fast approaching.

A long, bright streak of light, which perpetually increased in length and breadth, warned them of the advent of the new day.

The hour, however, was a very early one; and, in that lonely part of the country, the highwaymen did not apprehend much danger from being seen.

Still, the sooner they got under cover, the better; for the day was coming on with rapid strides.

They were now, they thought, quite as near the place of their destination as they desired to be.

At present they had not made up their minds what place of shelter they should seek; and, probably, they would not.

In such matters they preferred trusting to luck entirely.

It was not possible for them to arrange their plans to any great extent as to what they should do in the future, for they could never tell what effects the next hour would produce.

Now, however, that it was so fast becoming daylight, the necessity of finding some place where they could remain out of sight until midnight, forced itself powerfully upon them.

It would not do any longer to delay; and, therefore, as they rode along the narrow lanes, Turpin and King looked over the hedgerows on the right and left of them, in the hope that they should presently perceive something that would answer their purpose.

It was easy to tell by the expression of his countenance that Dick Turpin's mind was busily occupied about something.

His brows were knit with anxiety, and his lips moved slightly, as though he was communing with himself upon some important subject.

Tom King was too much engaged in looking about him to notice it; but, as the reader may be sure, it did not escape Mand's observation.

She looked curiously and furtively into his countenance, as though she would fain have read his thoughts, but she found this to be a task far beyond her powers.

She could tell he was suffering great anxiety from some cause or other, but there her knowledge ended.

She hesitated to question him, for she was well aware that their perilous situation demanded much earnest thought, and a double responsibility rested upon him, for in the hour of danger both looked up to him to receive instructions how they were to act.

Maud little thought that the anxiety under which Turpin laboured, proceeded chiefly from herself.

But such was the case.

It was upon her account that Turpin felt so much anxiety.

He was wondering what place he could find where she would receive those comforts of which she stood so much in need, and not only that, Dick felt that it would be quite impossible for her to accompany him in all his excursions.

Such a thing was entirely out of the question.

But, then, what should he do with her?

There was but one answer to this question.

He must find some place of refuge for her where she could remain in perfect safety while he pursued his hazardous career.

Where, however, in all the length and breadth of England, was such a place to be found?

What shelter would be secure from the prying eyes of the police-officers, who were so intent upon his capture?

That was the difficulty in which our hero found himself, and this was the reason why his countenance wore such a thoughtful expression.

Thought after thought passed through his brain, but he was obliged to reject them one after another as unfeasible.

In the meantime, the day came speeding on.

The sun rose, and tinged with his golden and early beams the wintry-looking landscape, giving it an aspect of great beauty.

And during all this time they had not come in sight of a single habitation of any description.

Nothing but fields, meadows, and pasture-land met their view.

They were unable, too, to see for any great distance in any direction, owing to the rolling masses of mist which rose up from the damp earth, and floated about before the faint early morning breeze.

As the sun rose higher and gained greater power the mist would be dispersed, but, from their quantity and density, this would not be for an hour to come at least.

At length Tom King noticed that Dick Turpin did not speak, and that a long time had elapsed since he said anything.

Accordingly he turned round towards him, and then he noticed his thoughtful aspect.

"What is the matter, Dick?" he asked. "Has anything gone wrong?"

Dick started when he was addressed like one suddenly awake from sleep.

Recovering himself instantly, he said—
"I have been wondering what would be the best place of shelter we could find. I should wish something as comfortable as possible. It is not as though we were alone; if we were, we could rough it."

"So we could, Dick; but when I turned round I was just going to ask you what place of refuge we should be able to find."

"I have no idea, though I have been perplexing my brain for some time upon that very point."

"I can think of nothing but some quiet road-side inn, where we could put up for a few hours."

Turpin shook his head.

"We must think of something better than that. Our late experience at the 'Mountain Rill' ought to show us that an inn is not a place at all suited to our purpose."

"Yes, I thought of that. Now, if Tom Davis had got a place—"

"Don't mention that," said Turpin. "If that worthy fellow kept an inn now as he used to do in olden times, all our difficulties would vanish at once. He would sacrifice his own life rather than any harm should come to us."

"He would—he would. You know more of him than I do, and yet, from what little I have seen, I am sure you are right."

"Quite right. Ah! Tom, you little think what a pang it gave me when I found them reduced to absolute beggary. You will recollect—I once told you of it."

"I know you did."

"It is often in my thoughts. On that occasion I did all that was in my power to aid him, which, unfortunately, was not much. Since then, I have been so hunted about, that I have never had the least opportunity of looking after them. It is a duty which I ought to perform, and nothing that I could do would ever repay the debt of obligation I owe to him. He has saved my life more times than once."

"So you have said, Dick—so you have said. I can tell that this is a most painful subject for you to speak upon, and so let us change the topic. We have no time to pursue it now. Look how fast the sun rises in the sky. We must get under cover, and that at once. If we delay much longer we shall be seen, and then all hopes of safety in this quarter will vanish."

"That is true enough, Tom; and I know Maud would only be too glad to quit the saddle, in which she has sat for so many hours."

He turned towards her as he spoke.

With a faint, and somewhat weary smile upon her lips, she replied—

"Do not heed me; believe me, I am not fatigued; but, as Tom says, I am fearful that we should be seen and recognised now that it is broad daylight."

"Your fear is a just one, and I only wish we could remove it."

"Look yonder," said Maud, pointing over the hedge-row with her whip as she spoke. "I can see a building of some sort there. What is it, think you?"

"That, I know not. It is a strange-looking place. What do you think of it, Tom?"

"I was just looking. You see that confounded mist which keeps rolling about prevents us from obtaining anything like a clear view of it, but it appears to me to be some kind of ruin."

"It has, most certainly, a ruinous appearance. I wonder what it can be?"

"I think we cannot do better than try to get close to it," said Tom King. "If it should be a ruin it will probably be uninhabited, and if it will not afford us permanent shelter, it will do for a time."

"Agreed," said Turpin, "for I can see nothing else."

"We must look about us for some means of approach. It is some distance from the side of this lane, and we are on a piece of rising ground."

"Forward, Tom! Doubtless a little further on we shall come to a turning that will lead towards it."

When Maud had spoken all three had come to a halt, but now they set themselves in motion again.

The bidding to which she had directed their attention seemed a very large one, but it could only be seen imperfectly in consequence of the masses of mist which were floating over the meadows.

Indeed, all that could be seen of it was the chimneys and some of the higher portions of the roof.

It was these which presented a ruinous appearance.

The chimneys and chimney-pots were much mutilated, and one was completely broken away.

Such a condition of things as this seemed to indicate that the place was uninhabited.

Our friends trusted that it might prove to be so, in which case they would have no further trouble.

As they descended from the rather elevated piece of ground upon which they had halted, they lost sight of the building altogether, as the hedge-rows and the mist combined completely hid it from sight.

Both Turpin and King, however, kept on the look out for some turning which would lead them in a direction somewhere to the left of that they were now taking.

They were, however, unable to find any such turning, though they noted that the lane itself wound round gradually to the right, and seemed to promise, if they followed its devious course, that it would lead them past the building.

In this hope they pressed onward with additional speed, for they were fearful every moment of meeting with some one, and their presence in that lonely district, where strangers were scarcely seen, would be sure to be commented upon.

Should they be seen in the vicinity of this building, it would cease to promise them the least security.

At a kind of gallop, then, the three friends continued their course along the lane, until suddenly they came in sight of some large gates.

They drew rein at once.

"Is this the entrance, think you?" asked Tom King.

"I fancy so, by the rusty and dilapidated condition of the gates; but I can see nothing of the building itself."

"Nor I."

"What do you say? Shall we enter these grounds and explore them? We may find it well worth our trouble to do so."

"I have no objection to such a proceeding. The gate hangs open temptingly, so we shall be saved any trouble in effecting an entrance."

Tom was right.

The massive iron gates, which once no doubt had been very handsome ones, were now almost eaten away with rust.

Those elaborate portions which had once given it such an appearance of elegance, were now completely filled up with oxide, and the perpendicular rods were in some places so attenuated, that they were no thicker than thread, and could have been broken as easily.

The massive stone pillars upon which the gates were hung, also exhibited symptoms of decay.

The stonework was chipped and cracked, while the upper portion, upon which some figure had no doubt been placed, had completely crumbled away.

One of the gates retained its proper position, though it was drawn sadly out of shape, but the other one had swung open and there remained.

The upper hinge had given way, and the mere weight of the mass of iron-work had caused it to sink deeply into the damp ground.

Weeds and curious creeping shrubs had grown up and around it, and now to close the gate would have been a matter of impossibility.

On both sides of the gate a row of trees had been planted, forming, no doubt, at one time, a handsome avenue.

But now winter had stripped the trees of every leaf and bud.

Nothing but the bare, dead-looking branches remained, which looked like so many arms stretched out menacingly towards those who approached.



[CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK STOP THE FARMER ON THE HIGHWAY.]

The trunks of these tall and stately trees were covered with some green, parasitic kind of moss, which seemed to flourish and look green in spite of all the bitter blasts of winter.

The ground between these trees was completely overgrown with such wild and rank vegetation as is to be found in the dampest and inmost recesses of a wood.

It was clear that a long time had elapsed since any human foot had trodden that place.

The same thing was observable in the land itself. It seemed as though it was rarely, if ever, visited.

For at least a moment they were so surprised at the strange sight that they did not speak, but having reined in their steeds, did nothing but gaze about them.

Such a scene of ruin and neglect could scarcely have been conceived.

Its contemplation had a chilling effect upon the blood, and unconsciously our three friends shivered as though smitten with an ague.

Tom King was the first to speak.

"Well," he said, "I really do think this is about the most lonesome and cheerless spot I ever beheld. I should never have believed that such a spectacle of desolation could have existed."

"It is inexpressibly dreary," said Turpin.

"Very so, but we must not mind that. We ought to look upon these visible and unmistakable signs of the place being deserted by everyone with feelings of the utmost satisfaction, since it seems to promise us that safety and security which we so much desire."

CHAPTER CCCCXV.

DICK TURPIN, TOM KING, AND MAUD, AT LENGTH
ARRIVE AT THE RUINED MANSION.

THIS very strange spectacle of desolation came somewhat suddenly upon our friends. An abrupt turn in the lane had brought them in view of it.

"You are right," said Turpin. "Such is, indeed, the light in which we ought to look upon it. From the appearance of the place, I can have little doubt that these are the entrance gates leading up to the ruined building of which we caught a glimpse from the summit of the hill. I think we may be sure that we shall be able to remain here unmolested."

"It seems so. But look, Dick, what is that? Do you see that board, or whatever it is, that seems to be fixed on the bars of the gate?"

"Yes, yes. What is it?"

"That is just what I should like to know. There seems to be something painted on it. If I can decipher it, it may give us some necessary information."

"I am afraid you will not be able to do that, my friend."

"Nevertheless, I will alight and try," said Tom; "and I think, if we are to pass through the gates, you had better alight as well."

"Wait a moment. You shall look at that curious board first."

Tom King alighted from his steed in a moment, and, holding him by the bridle, led him towards the gate.

The piece of board to which he had alluded was of that shape which is generally employed for painting notices upon.

As he drew near to it, however, Tom perceived that it was in the last stage of rottenness and decay.

It looked as though the whole would have crumbled away beneath the least touch.

Still there were traces left upon its surface which showed that at some time or other an inscription had been painted upon it.

But what was its purport would now be a vain task to conjecture.

Tom could just see some letters, and one line that seemed to stretch right across the board.

After an attentive examination, and by dint of deciphering one or two of the letters, he pronounced this line to consist merely of the word "Trespassing" or "Trespassers."

"It is probable, then, that this board was simply a warning to trespassers."

"It seems very much like it. Shall we pass through the gates and try what further we can discover?"

"I think so."

"Let me advise you to alight then. If you do not, you will have a great deal of trouble in preventing your heads from in contact with those low boughs of the trees!"

Turpin acquiesced in this, and immediately quitted his saddle.

He then assisted Maud to alight.

Taking the bridles of the horses in their hands, all three passed through the dilapidated gateway, and took their course along the neglected avenue.

They found walking by no means an easy task.

At every step they took their feet sank deeply into the soft oozy soil, and became entangled in the clinging, trailing plants that grew in such wild luxuriance in every direction.

It would, however, have been no less disagreeable had they remained on horseback, for the majestic trees, with which the avenue was lined, had been allowed to grow in all their native wildness.

The branches straggled across the avenue in the most perplexing manner and in every conceivable direction.

Even as they walked on foot they had occasionally to bend their heads or step aside in order to avoid some low-lying or interlacing branch.

As is generally the case, this avenue of trees was serpentine in shape, so that at no time could they see far before them.

As for the building, that was completely hidden from view, and they had no idea in which direction they ought to look for it.

Suddenly, however, Turpin caught sight of some of the chimney-tops, which were visible through the trees.

In a moment more they vanished again.

They had now scarcely, if any, doubt that these neglected and deserted grounds, through which they were with so much difficulty forcing their way, belonged to the ruinous building they had seen from the summit of the hill.

It was so it seemed as though the highwaymen had accidentally stumbled upon a place which would offer them every promise of safety and security.

Occupied with these thoughts, and occasionally speaking to each other, they steadily kept on along the apparently interminable avenue, wishing every moment to reach the end.

The silence which prevailed about this place was really terrible, and had a most depressing effect upon the spirits.

At almost every step they took some wild bird or animal started off swiftly, making the dried, frost-bitten branches of the trees rustle and crackle in their progress.

From all these considerations our friends were warranted in coming to the conclusion that no other feet besides theirs had trodden upon that soil for a long, long time.

How long it was out of their power to tell.

It seemed to them that the further they got from the gates the wilder and more desolate the whole place appeared to be.

At no other season of the year than the present would it have appeared more dreary and wretched.

In the glorious summer time, when the trees were all in full leaf, when the grass and shrubs were green, and when wild flowers were blooming all around, the scene would have been one that would have charmed the soul from its mere wildness—so suggestive as it was, of those times so long gone past never to return.

Now, however, that sole charm was altogether absent.

There was much in a general way to make our friends somewhat gloomy, and it required them to be light-hearted to a degree so as not to sink beneath the perils of their situation.

It is not to be wondered at, then, if this cheerless-looking place should throw a gloom over their souls.

All felt its influence, and they found all their struggles to resist it quite in vain.

The one who felt this most of all was Maud, and yet, strange to say, she was the one that exhibited it the least.

The length of this avenue must have been a mile at least, though, to our friends, owing to their impatience and the difficulties they met with at every step, it seemed more than double the distance.

At length, however, its extremity was reached, and then, and not till then, did they obtain a view of the building of which they had had two transient glimpses.

The avenue terminated somewhat abruptly upon a law of rather contracted dimensions.

It was surrounded by a low wall, and two steps led to it.

But now few of the appearances which a lawn presents were discernible.

It was one tangled mass of weeds and thistles.

Upon this, however, the eyes of the highwaymen and their fair companion did not linger.

Their curiosity had been much excited with respect to this building, and now that it was fairly before them they had eyes for nothing else.

It was a strange and wild, weird-looking place, which corresponded well with the scenery that surrounded it.

A glance was almost sufficient to assure them that it was untenanted.

No human beings would take up their abode in such a place unless from the direst necessity.

All the windows were closed and protected by wooden shutters.

Upon these green moss had grown thickly, affording unquestionable proof that they had not been touched for a long period.

A door, too, presented the same appearance.

The walls were everywhere crumbling and ruinous, and threatening to fall.

It was now day, and an hour when most people would be astir; but from no one of those quaint and broken chimneys came the thinnest wreaths of smoke.

Such a silence, too, reigned all around as was quite incompatible with the presence of human beings.

It was as though the three persons who composed the little party were alone in the world.

Tom King raised his riding whip and pointed with it to the desolate building.

"What think you of that?" he asked. "It does not present a very tempting appearance, does it? and yet I should think it must be safe."

"No doubt of that," said Turpin; "but I must confess

that, if I had been permitted, I should have chosen some more comfortable-looking place."

"Pho! pho! Dick; never heed that. It is all the better. We may safely say that this place, for some cause of which we are ignorant, is shunned by every one. I looked carefully about me all the way hither, and could nowhere see the least trace of a human foot."

"Nor I. And I, too, looked closely."

"Then I think we may go as far as to say that no one knows precisely that we are in this part of the country. I am sure we have passed no one who could set our enemies upon our track, and it is quite certain the dragoons who pursued us were not close enough upon our track to note the direction we took."

"I grant all that, Tom."

"Very well, and you must know as well as I do to what point my remarks lead. No one knows we are here; no one visits this place. Therefore, I say, that here we are likely to remain unsuspected and in safety."

"There does seem every probability of it, and I suppose that makes you think that we ought to overlook any of the disagreeables?"

"It ought to reconcile you with the whole of them."

"Well, come, I will not say that it does not; but it strikes me we are talking a little too soon. It would be better if we were to get nearer to the building, and ascertain first whether it is or is not tenanted; and secondly, whether we can obtain an entrance into it."

"If we can get over the first difficulty you can leave the second to me. That would be no obstacle, I know. I will guarantee to get in if there's nobody there."

"Very well, Tom. And as I think we have stood here talking quite long enough, I propose we approach the place a little closer. It is fortunate all the windows are provided with shutters, for if they were not, and anyone was within, we have stood a good chance of being perceived."

"I think that is a needless apprehension, Dick, for all the windows appear to me to be protected with shutters, which look as though they had not been touched for years."

"They have that appearance. But come, you lead the way, Tom, and we will follow."

"With all my heart," replied Tom King. And as he spoke he stepped forward, leading his horse at the same moment, and without difficulty ascended the two steps which led up to the lawn.

Dick Turpin, Maud, and the other two horses followed closely behind him.

Very little traces of a lawn were now perceptible in the piece of wild-looking ground which spread out before the mansion.

The grass upon it reached almost to their knees, and it was thickly intermingled with thistles and other weeds of a prickly character, which made walking somewhat unpleasant and disagreeable.

Disregarding these minor inconveniences, our friends struck across it in a straight line to the front of the mansion.

They did not halt until they reached the foot of the flight of stone steps, but here were compelled to pause.

"Now," said King, "a question arises. If we find, as we anticipate, that this mansion is uninhabited, and consequently make our way into it, what shall we do with our horses?"

"They must not be forgotten, certainly."

"They must not be forgotten, because we owe our present and future safety to them entirely."

"Just so. But do you think that I should have forgotten Black Bess. Still I think we had better see to ourselves first, and then attend to the horses afterwards."

"Just as you like."

"You have halted before the front-door, Tom. Do you think that the best point at which to attempt to effect an entrance?"

"Well, no—not exactly. Upon second thoughts, I think we had better go round to the back."

"I think so, too. Indeed, we ought to survey the building all round before we make an attack upon it."

"It will be more prudent by far to do so."

Having agreed upon this, they made their way round to the back of the mansion.

In doing so, they were surprised at its extent, which was much greater than they had imagined.

They kept a careful look out all the time, and it may be said with safety that no portion of the building whatever escaped their observation.

All was silent and deserted, and the rustling which they made in forcing their way through the rank vegetation sounded with ominous loudness.

At length the back of the mansion was reached.

Here they found numerous buildings, which probably served in former times for servants' offices; and, as they looked towards them, our friends felt certain that here, if anywhere, would be found the inhabitants of the place.

CHAPTER CCCCXVI.

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN SUCCEED IN EFFECTING AN ENTRANCE INTO THE DESERTED MANSION.

WE are thus minute in describing the approach of the highwaymen to this deserted mansion, because the events which afterwards occurred there were of so strange, wild, and wonderful a nature as to make some such introduction necessary, lest, coming upon the reader with too much suddenness and unexpectedness, they should be deemed improbable.

It may, however, be easily believed that the awful stillness which reigned about this spot—rendered more striking as it was by their footsteps being the only sound that broke upon it—was not without producing a great effect upon the minds of the three persons who composed the little party.

There was a strange, fluttered feeling about their hearts—an indescribable tremor, which extended over the whole of their body—which indicated that their minds were worked up to a high degree of excitement.

Without knowing it, they felt a conviction that they were standing upon the threshold of a most remarkable adventure—one that would make all their former achievements seem tame and dull.

In this place let us take the opportunity of describing briefly the exterior appearance of the mansion which was destined to be the scene of these strange occurrences.

We can do so while Turpin and Tom King and Maud are occupied in walking round it and examining it.

The style, then, in which it was built is that which now-a-days is termed the Elizabethan.

But it is probable that this building, although presenting this appearance, had been built—or, at least, the greater portion of it—before Queen Bess ascended the throne of England.

Despite the aspect of desolation which hung over it, it was not without a certain picturesqueness, which would, however, have been much increased had the surroundings been more cheerful.

But the ground around, which, doubtless, once had been in a high state of cultivation, had now such an appearance of neglect that it made the building seem ten times more dreary than it really was.

In addition to this, our friends first saw it soon after sunrise on a gloomy winter's morning, so that everything was disadvantaged it.

Still, its mullioned windows, its quaintly-shaped and elaborately-finished gables and chimneys, its pointed roofs, all had a pleasing look.

No doubt in former times this place had been very beautiful, for now there were so many traces of that beauty left.

But the beautiful carving with which the stonework had been adorned was now so much worn away by time that its elegancies could not be distinguished.

Indeed, the whole edifice was in a state of crumbling ruin and decay, and seemed as though in a short time it would cease to be inhabitable unless prompt and efficient steps were taken to make it so.

So much for the dwelling itself.

It was entirely surrounded by grounds of vast extent, once beautifully cultivated, but now allowed to return to primitive wildness.

All these things were noted by the highwaymen, and commented upon as they made the tour of the building.

They arrived, at length, once more at the rear, where the out-buildings were situated, without having been able to detect the least signs of the place being inhabited.

In fact, they felt themselves justified in entertaining the

conviction that no footsteps besides their own had trodden there for many years.

Still, with a due and requisite amount of caution, they approached the servants' offices, for such they undoubtedly were, or rather had been.

These did not present quite such a dilapidated appearance as the rest of the structure, but probably they had been more recently erected.

Here, as elsewhere, all was still.

Seeing before them a door, which seemed to be the back entrance, our friends made their way towards it.

Upon a nearer approach they discovered that this door was overgrown with the same kind of green moss which had spread everywhere around, and which had unquestionably been engendered by the damp.

The steps, the door-posts, and the brickwork adjoining were all covered with the same parasitic growth, and it was clear that that door had not been opened recently, or traces would remain of it.

Our friends noticed, too, that where they trod the moss disappeared, being crushed into the soft earth or ground to water upon the stones.

Looking back, they could see that where this had taken place was just where they alone had trod.

This seemed proof positive that they had the place entirely to themselves.

Tom King surrendered the bridle of his horse to Dick, and mounted the three steps that led to the back door.

Upon this was a huge knocker.

As soon as he perceived it, he said -

"I don't believe there's anyone here, Dick; but still, before we break in, suppose I was to knock. That summons being so legitimate a one, would surely be attended to."

"There can be no harm in trying," replied Turpin. "For, of course, it is important in the first degree that we should know whether there was or was not anyone within."

"Here goes, then," said Tom King; and as he spoke he seized the knocker vigorously with his right hand.

It was his intention to execute a rather startling rat-tat with it.

But, to his astonishment, he found that it required the exertion of his utmost strength to raise the knocker in the least, and then, when it was lifted about two inches from the door, it required the same, or nearly the same amount of strength, to bring it down into its former place again.

From this it was evident that the knocker had not been very lately used.

It had actually become so incrustured with rust as to make it thus difficult to move.

This was encouraging to Tom, who endeavoured to push the door open by main strength.

But in this attempt he failed most signally.

The door was as firm as a rock.

No doubt, had all the fastenings been removed, it would have been somewhat difficult to force the door open, for probably the wood had swelled with the damp and stuck it firmly in the frame.

"We must try some other place than this, Dick," said Tom.

"There is a window yonder. The hinges of the shutter before it seem to have rusted away. Suppose you try to move that."

Dick Turpin alluded to a mossy-grown shutter, which covered a small window on the ground floor.

Tom hastened towards it, and seizing the woodwork at the lower part of it, gave it a sudden jerk.

A creaking, splitting sound followed, and this encouraged him to make another effort.

Turpin, seeing that the shutter was fixed more firmly than he had fancied, let go the bridle of the horses, and came to his assistance.

One more pull, given with their united strengths, completely removed the shutter.

A small-sized, latticed window was then disclosed.

With the butt-end of a pistol Tom broke those panes which were nearest to the casings with which the casement was fastened, and introducing his hand, undid them easily, though he found these even were covered with rust.

The window was composed of one leaf, which opened on two hinges like a door, as all windows opened before the introduction of the modern rope and pulleys.

Within, all was darkness, so that Tom could not tell very well into what sort of place it was that this window led, but it seemed to be a small-sized room.

"Here is the way into the house," he said, "and I think we may feel pretty sure that we have the place all to ourselves, or we should have seen something of the inhabitants before we had got thus far with our proceedings."

"I think we have no longer cause to feel apprehensive upon that head."

"Well, then, I think before we go any further, we ought to look to the horses. Having placed them somewhere in safety, we shall be able to enter through this window with very little trouble."

"It will be best to dispose of the cattle at once, and then we shall have that trouble off our minds."

"Do you think it would be safe to turn them loose? The grass seems very rank, but still their instinct would prevent them from eating anything injurious."

"It would, no doubt; but I fear it would be an unwise and dangerous proceeding to let them have their liberty."

"They might stray away."

"They might, but that is not what I chiefly apprehend. There would be a great risk of their being seen, and then our presence here would no longer be a secret."

"Of course. It will not do for that reason to let them loose, because our safety here will depend solely upon no one knowing anything of our whereabouts."

"Just so."

"But what is to be done?"

"Do you see that building yonder at a little distance?"

"Yes."

"That looks like a stable, does it not?"

"I have no doubt that is what it is."

"Then we will break the door open, and put the horses in there. Then there will be no fear of their being seen."

"But how about fodder?"

"Ah! that is another difficulty. There is little hope of our finding any in the stable."

"None at all, I should say."

"There is only one thing we can do. We must gather the grass as well as we can, and give it them to eat."

"I do not see what else we are to do."

"Nor I."

"Come, then; let us see if we can get into the stable."

The highwaymen then crossed what had once been a paved yard, and presently halted before the door of the building in question.

In appearance it in no way differed from the others they had seen, so far as being overgrown with moss was concerned.

But it was not a strong door, and was fastened with a padlock and chain.

As soon as he saw this, Tom knew that it would be easy enough to get into the stable, and he immediately looked about him for a stone.

There were several large pebbles at a short distance, and he selected one of them.

Holding this in his hand, he struck the chain and padlock some very heavy blows with it.

In this manner he completely shattered the padlock, and then the door opened to their hands.

As they expected, it led into a stable, which was divided into several stalls.

There was room for at least a dozen horses.

This was just what they wanted, so with all convenient speed they divested their steeds of saddle and bridle and led them up to the mangers.

There was nothing in them to eat, nor did they think it worth while to look for any fodder in the loft overhead, as, if they had found any, the chances were a thousand to one that it would be unfit for the horses to eat.

Instead of wasting their time, therefore, they went outside, and set to work in good earnest to gather a quantity of grass.

This was done with much greater ease and speed than they had expected, for the grass being of great length enabled them to take hold of it firmly, and the ground being very soft it came up by the roots with ease.

Having in this manner gathered a very large heap, they proceeded to carry it into the stable, giving each horse an equal quantity.

This was the best they could do for the present, so they left them to look after themselves.

As the reader will easily believe, it took some time to do all that we have described, and when our friends once more stood before the window through which they hoped to gain admission to the mansion, they found, on looking up to the sky, that the sun had attained a considerable altitude.

All three were much fatigued by their recent exertions, and they locked forward to a rest with feelings of great pleasure and satisfaction.

"I will get in first," said Tom King; and as he spoke he stepped on to the window-sill, for it was so near the ground that he was able to do so with ease.

In another moment he had passed through the casement and was standing in the little room—if room it was, for its dimensions were so contracted as to make it doubtful whether it deserved such a name.

"Now let Maud come," said Tom. "You can assist her on that side, and I can assist her on this."

"All right."

With Turpin's help Maud easily got on to the window-sill, and then Tom King, taking hold of her hand, enabled her to jump down.

Dick followed quickly, and closed the window after him.

The glance which they cast around them was one of very great curiosity.

It was not long, however, before they came to the conclusion that the place in which they stood had once been a butler's pantry.

But now nothing, save the damp, bare walls was left. A small door, and seemingly a strong one, was the only means of exit.

To this Tom King at once advanced.

As he had more than half expected, it was fast.

The lock was on the inner side, and Tom ascertained, with the blade of his clasp-knife, that the bolt had been shot.

At first he tried to force the bolt back by inserting the point of his knife, but he failed, and, having broken a piece off the end of the blade in the attempt, he desisted.

Turpin then suggested that he should remove the screws which screwed the lock to the door.

This was a tedious operation, but Tom set about it in good earnest, for he could see no other means by which the door could be opened.

CHAPTER CCCCXVII.

OUR FRIENDS BEGIN TO HOPE THAT, AFTER ALL, THE DESERTED MANSION WILL AFFORD THEM SAFE SHELTER FROM THEIR FOES.

SLOWLY and steadily Tom King proceeded with his work, and at length the screws were one by one removed.

A sudden wrench, then, forced the lock completely away, and the door swung open, leaving a clear passage before them.

They shrank back, slightly, from entering the darkness beyond, but this was a feeling which they shook off almost immediately.

Turpin's duty was to remain with Maud.

She clung to him as though terrified.

And who could wonder at it, when the strange scene by which she was surrounded was taken into consideration.

Tom King, therefore, was the one who took upon himself to lead the way.

The darkness, however, was very disagreeable, and he consulted his comrade as to the expediency of lighting one of the pieces of wax-candle he had in his pocket.

Turpin consented at once, chiefly on Maud's account, who he fancied would be cheered and reassured by a light.

There might be some danger in its being seen, but he resolved to run the risk of that.

Moreover he had noticed, when outside, that all the shutters were closed, therefore the whole of the mansion would be in utter darkness.

Strangers in it as they were, they might fall into some danger while pursuing their explanations, if they had no light.

Tom King was quite willing, and then Turpin said—

"Where did you get that candle?"

"It's a brave bit, isn't it? and I have got another piece in my pocket, quite as large."

"Where did you get them from?"

"From the inn. I took them out of the candlesticks and put them into my pocket, for I thought they would come useful some time or other."

"I am glad you did so. They will prove of great service to us."

A tiny flame now appeared, which quickly increased in brightness, and then they were enabled to see about them with tolerable comfort.

They were in a short, narrow passage, from both sides of which several doors opened.

There was also a door at each end of it.

One of these doors, from the position it occupied, Tom felt certain was the one at which he had so ineffectually endeavoured to gain admittance.

Accordingly they did not trouble themselves in the least about that, but directed their attention to the one at the opposite end of the passage, and which they felt no doubt communicated with the mansion itself, for they were now only in the out-buildings or servants' offices which surrounded it.

About twenty steps took them to this door.

At a glance Tom saw that it was well secured.

When the house had been left, no matter for what reason it had been abandoned, great care had been taken to secure it from being entered, and from this circumstance alone our friends were led to believe that they were on the threshold of making some important discovery or other.

Everything they saw was indicative of substantialness and strength.

The door before which they now stood seemed a impassable barrier to those who had not the proper tools to set to work upon it.

But Tom did not despair.

He gave Turpin the candle to hold, and with his broken knife he commenced an attack upon the lock.

He treated it in the same way as he had the preceding one, and after some delay the way laid open before them.

As soon as the door was pushed open they perceived there was no longer any need for the lighted candle.

They found themselves at the lower end of what was evidently the entrance-hall of the mansion.

This was filled with a soft, dim, and beautiful light, the source of which they did not immediately discover.

As they advanced, however, they saw that it came in part from the fanlight over the front door, and partly from a skylight in the roof of the mansion, for the staircase was somewhat of a well-shape, and ascended to the top of the building.

Our friends gazed around them in admiration.

There were traces of grandeur and beauty visible in that deserted hall, although the hideous aspect of ruin and desolation was so obtrusive.

The dust lay thickly everywhere, thus showing that, however closely and carefully the doors had been closed, they had not been closed carefully enough to exclude this mysterious substance, which seems to possess the faculty of penetrating everywhere.

Several doors opened from this hall, but all were shut, and doubtless fastened.

They did not try any of them, but Dick said—

"I think we may safely come to the conclusion that there is no one in this house, and that we have it all to ourselves."

"Oh! decidedly," said Tom King. "If there had been anyone here, we should not have been allowed to proceed as far as we have without some notice being taken of our intrusion. You may depend, for some reason or other, this house has been shut up and deserted, and allowed to fall to ruin just as it pleased."

"That seems a very strange state of things, Tom."

"It does. But do you recollect Durley Chine?"

"I shall never forget it."

"I am reminded of it by this place. But as for finding this mansion in this state, I do not think it anything to be surprised at. Such a thing is far from being uncommon. Sometimes it is the result of caprice upon the part of the owners, and sometimes it is owing to legal proceedings, such as the property being in Chancery, or without an heir, or something of that sort."

"Doubtless," replied Turpin, "there are plenty of means by which the desertion of this place could be explained; but I do not think it worth our while to trouble our heads about them."

"Certainly not. Our own affairs, if we will only give them proper consideration, will suffice to occupy the whole of our time."

"Well, then, let us first of all try to find some place in this house where we can rest ourselves. I should prefer to try the upper floor."

"So should I, because then we should be able to command a good view of the country round."

"Let us ascend these stairs then."

"With all my heart; for it seems there is nothing for us to see on the ground-floor, without we choose to take the trouble of forcing open all these doors."

The little party now began to ascend the stairs.

Their footsteps raised strange echoes in that deserted habitation, and, as they heard them, strange thoughts and feelings filled their breasts.

But they strove, as well as they could, not to succumb to their influence, and spoke to each other upon indifferent topics.

At length the top of the staircase was reached, and here they paused.

As they had ascended they noticed that all the doors that opened from the landings were closed, and these upon the topmost flight of all were no exception.

But the doors were not of a heavy make, and the two highwaymen doubted not that they should be able to burst one open.

Tom advanced, and tried the handles in rapid succession.

All the doors were fast.

"Break one open," said Turpin, "and let us see what kind of place there is beyond."

Tom turned the knob of one of the doors, and pressed against it in a peculiar manner with his knee and shoulder.

He was in such a position as to be able to exercise his utmost strength, and he pushed firmly and steadily.

The door cracked ominously, and gave signs of giving way.

But Turpin, fancying his comrade's strength was insufficient for the task, came to his assistance.

By their joint efforts the door was quickly burst open.

It led into a small chamber, in which, to their surprise, they found a few articles of furniture remaining.

Perhaps they were deemed not worthy of the trouble of carrying away.

At any rate, there they were.

The articles consisted of a small rude table, a few chairs, and a bedstead, which was in one corner.

By the appearance of this latter object, it would seem as though it had been devoted to a servant's use.

All the things were of a more antique fashion than any our friends had ever seen, and Maud looked about her with some interest and curiosity.

"Come," said Dick, in a cheerful voice, as he took in at a glance the general aspect of the room, "we shall be far more comfortable here than I thought we should be. Here are chairs to sit down upon, and a table and a bedstead. When we have made a fire the place will be as comfortable as you please."

The cheerful manner in which Dick Turpin spoke was not without producing a due effect upon his hearers.

The chamber, rude and comfortless as it really was, assumed a more cheerful aspect.

"And here is a window," said Tom King, in the same tone of voice, "which commands an extensive view. We shall be able to see danger long before it comes near us."

This window was somewhat important to them, so they all crowded towards it.

It was a small latticed casement, unprovided with shutters, like the rest of the windows in the house.

Our friends were able to see for a long distance.

Beneath and all around them were the neglected grounds belonging to the deserted mansion.

They were in the front of the house, and with their eyes they could easily follow the route they had just come.

There was the weed-grown lawn, the avenue of trees, but not the gate by which they had entered.

That was hidden from their view by trees.

A prospect of beautiful country, many miles in extent, spread out before them, and in summer the view must have been a lovely one to gaze upon, but now all was bleak and wintry looking.

They continued to look out of the window for some time,

until, indeed, their eyes had grown familiar with the different features of the landscape.

Then they turned away, and Turpin said—

"In the first place, we must find something to make a fire with, and then we shall be comfortable enough."

"I am afraid though," said Tom King, "that we shall be obliged to forego that comfort."

"You fear the smoke will be seen?"

"Yes, and if it is, the secret of our being here will immediately be known."

"I think we may reduce the smoke to a mere trifle. When we light the fire we must put on but a small quantity of fuel, and then replenish it by slow degrees, so that the smoke will leave the chimney in the form of an imperceptible vapour."

"We might succeed in doing that."

"We must try, for without a fire this place will be unbearable."

"But where are we to find fuel?"

"We must look."

"Suppose we were to break open another of the doors, and cut that door up into fragments with our swords."

"That will answer the purpose admirably; and then, not only that, we might find some articles in the next room which would do for firewood."

"So we might."

While speaking our friends passed out of the room again on to the landing, and paused before another of the doors.

This was forced open in the manner we have previously described.

The chamber, however, contained no other article of furniture, save a bed, and this they never thought for a moment of destroying, since it was likely to prove so useful.

"I firmly believe," said Turpin, "that chance, in directing us to the house, has brought us to a place of permanent shelter, where we shall be able to remain in safety as long as ever we think proper."

"I hope so," said Tom King, "for such a place would be very convenient to us."

"It would, indeed; but let us carry out your suggestion. We will break this door to pieces with our swords and use it for firewood. Stand aside, and I will make the first stroke."

With their swords it was a comparatively easy matter for the highwaymen to chop the door to pieces, and they soon had such a heap of fragments lying on the floor as would last them for some time to come.

Taking a small quantity they re-entered the other room, and, placing them in the grate, set fire to them; for, as we have often remarked, the highwaymen took care never to be without the means of procuring a light readily.

With great anxiety they watched the ascending smoke, and, by the exercise of great caution, contrived to prevent it rising in large quantities.

The wood being dry made their task easier, for it soon burst into a blaze, and then the smoke was consumed.

When the fire had fairly burned up, the wood was brought and placed close at hand so as to replenish it without trouble; the rickety table was drawn up to the fire, and the chairs placed close by.

In these our friends seated themselves with manifest pleasure, for they were thoroughly wearied by their recent exertions.

All three were in high spirits, and a happier trio than those who now occupied the little room in the empty mansion could scarcely have been found.

CHAPTER CCCCXVIII.

RETURNS TO CLAUDE DUVAL AND SIXTEEN-STRING JACK, AND RELATES WHAT BEFEL THEM AFTER THEIR PARTING WITH DICK TURPIN IN ENFIELD CHASE.

SURELY the reader cannot have forgotten our old friends, Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack!

A long time has elapsed, however, since we last occupied ourselves with their adventures, and we think a more fitting time than the present for returning to them could not be found.

When we saw them last, as all, doubtless, well remember, was when they parted from Dick Turpin and Tom King in Enfield Chase.

They were to get off as well as they could, with the understanding that all were to re-unite upon the ill-omened

spot upon the Finchley-road, which had been selected as being well known to them, and not likely to be visited by their foes.

Indeed, it was a desolate and fearful spot.

It must be understood that the day on which we leave Dick Turpin, Tom King, and Maud in the empty house, is the one preceding the night upon which the meeting was appointed to take place.

To describe the adventures of Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack, we shall then be obliged to go back three days.

When they parted with their three friends, they did so with extreme reluctance, and looked back from time to time, anxious to keep them in sight as long as possible, for they thought how uncertain it was whether they should ever all meet again.

But the thick-growing trees in the chase soon hid them from their view.

Claude and Jack then occupied themselves solely with attending to their own safety.

They were close to the borders of the chase, but they knew not whether it would be safe for them to emerge into the open country.

They might suddenly find themselves assailed with a fresh danger, which might be fatal.

Upon this they held a consultation, and in the end determined to get as near the borders as they could, and then reconnoitre.

With this resolve they pushed forward slowly and cautiously, and, at length, came to a halt.

One more yard would take them beyond the shelter of the trees.

From this point they peered out, but could see nothing of their enemies.

Emboldened by this, they were about to proceed, when they were startled by the report of a gun.

"Turpin and King are in trouble," said Claude. "Let us rush to their assistance."

"Nay, nay," said Sixteen-String Jack, restraining him; "I have faith in their skill and ability to get off, and perhaps by going towards the spot from whence the sound of the shot appeared to come, so far from doing them any good, we shall only be getting ourselves into additional trouble."

"All right," said Claude Duval. "I had forgotten." Just as he spoke, there came the clear, ringing sound of a bugle.

The reader will remember how, when, and by whom the signal was given.

Claude and Jack heard it responded to from various points around them, and they looked at each other with an expression upon their countenances which said plainly enough—

"Something imminent is going on."

Directly after this they heard the dragoons forcing their way among the trees, all of them going in the direction from which the shot had proceeded.

"I think the best thing we can do is to be off," said Claude Duval.

"So I think," rejoined Sixteen-String Jack. "We shall never have a better opportunity than the present, for our foes seem to be all going in one direction."

"They do."

"Forward, then. There is no one in sight, and we will make a bold rush to get off."

"Agreed, I am ready."

At the same moment they touched their horses lightly with their spurs, and emerged at a smart trot.

A belt of waste, uncultivated ground surrounded the forest.

It was overgrown with rude bushes and brake.

To keep on through this was not an easy matter, but the two highwaymen knew better than to hesitate.

Despite the difficulties, they would not allow their horses to reduce their speed.

It was well for them that they did not.

A loud shout rang in their ears, and, turning round in the saddle, they perceived a number of dragoons making towards them with all speed possible.

They were mounted and well armed, and it was evidently their intention to give chase.

The two highwaymen took off their hats, and waved them defiantly.

Then reaching a less obstructed piece of road, they

goaded their horses with their spurs, and set forward at a speed which seemed to make all pursuit a hopeless matter.

Nevertheless, the dragoons showed that they had no intention of giving up the chase thus easily.

The prey was fairly on the road before them, and they resolved to spare no effort to hunt it down.

In this they thought they could scarcely fail, when they recollected how many bodies of dragoons were occupied in patrolling the roads, so that the highwaymen would continually find fresh and untired pursuers at their heels.

Capture, then, seemed inevitable, and, in high good spirits, the dragoons commenced the pursuit.

It was a change from the dull, inactive life they had so recently been leading.

Soon, however, they found that their own heavily accoutred horses were no match in point of fleetness for those belonging to the highwaymen, although, perhaps, they would be able to keep up longer.

It seemed to mortify them exceedingly, though, when they found the highwaymen gradually but perceptibly increasing the distance which intervened between them.

At length they got out of sight altogether, and eventually out of hearing also.

Still the dragoons kept perseveringly upon their track.

Their numbers had already been considerably reinforced, and they were well aware that, if the highwaymen continued along the road as they were then going, they must inevitably fall foul of the next patrol.

But Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack were not unmindful of this danger.

As soon as they had got so far ahead of their pursuers for the sound of their horses' hoofs to be inaudible, they pulled up.

"Claude," said Sixteen-String Jack, "this sort of thing will not do; if we keep on like this we shall gallop over the next lot of dragoons who are patrolling the road. We must turn aside. If we are only careful what we are about we shall distance those lumbering dragoons easily enough, for our horses are fresh and strong after their long rest."

"Let us go on more slowly, then, and the next lane we come to let us turn down it."

"We cannot do better."

Once more the highwaymen put spurs to their horses, and, at an easy gallop, swept along the smooth high road.

Both took care to keep a sharp look-out on both sides of them, and suddenly Sixteen-String Jack cried out—

"Halt! Claude, here is the very place."

They slackened speed as he spoke, and turned down a dark and narrow lane.

The darkness was caused by a quantity of tall trees which grew close together on both sides of it.

To see the ground was an impossibility; nevertheless they galloped along at a speed which seemed to evince an utter recklessness for their personal safety.

But the horses, feeling, no doubt, that all depended upon them, kept their feet admirably, by means of the wonderful instinct with which they are gifted.

Away they went, then, at a truly furious rate.

In a few minutes the end of the lane was reached, and they once more emerged upon the highway.

No sooner, however, had they done so, than they found they had run into the very danger they had been so solicitous to avoid.

Not ten yards from the spot where they emerged a troop of dragoons were trotting slowly along the road towards them.

No sooner did they catch sight of our two friends, than sudden exclamations came from their lips, which showed that the highwaymen were recognised.

In an instant all put spurs to their horses and galloped forward.

Our friends stood no other resource than to fly before them.

A loud voice from the rear came upon their ears.

"Halt!" it said, "halt! If you refuse, we fire; and the consequences be on your heads, not ours."

Jack and Claude could not forbear shuddering slightly—not so much at the words as at the cold-blooded tone in which they were uttered.

Of course they did not halt, but urged their horses to make their utmost speed.

A long pause followed, during which their hearts seemed to stand still, and the blood in their veins to grow cold.

Then one word broke the silence, and warned them that the moment of danger had come, perhaps the last moment they were destined to spend on earth.

The one word was—"Fire!"

The command was scarcely uttered before it was obeyed.

The dragoons all had their carbines ready

Their fingers rested on the triggers

Then came the rattling discharge.

A volley of bullets flew around our friends.

The horses swerved, and plunged, and galloped with the speed of terror.

No sooner had they fired than the dragoons came lumbering on.

In an anxious voice our friends addressed each other.

Both, however, were unhurt—at least comparatively so.

Sixteen-String Jack had been grazed on the cheek by a bullet, which had also clipped off a bit of his ear; but of so slight a misadventure as that he thought nothing of it.

"Forward, Claude, and all will yet be well. Take to the first lane on the left hand that you come to. If you turn to the right it will take you to Enfield Chase."

"Halt then," cried Claude, suddenly. "Gently. There is a lane. Go round the corner gently, and then put forth your speed."

Jack saw the turning of which his comrade spoke.

It was a few yards ahead, and he slackened speed as he approached it.

In another moment he swept round it, and then the dragoons lost sight of their prey.

But they were close enough at their heels to see where they had gone, and they, too, followed the highwaymen into the lane.

But the darkness was now baffling to a degree.

Still, the soldiers strained their sense of hearing to the utmost, and then they could just catch the dull echo of the flying steeds before them.

This encouraged them to keep on.

Of course the dragoons, as they were somewhere about twelve in number, made a great deal more noise than the two highwaymen, so that Claude and Jack could hear them come thundering after them for a long time.

By degrees, however, the sound grew fainter and fainter, until it was only at intervals that they could distinguish it.

They had traversed many lanes, as they found they led one into the other, but had not come to another public road.

For this they were glad, and the reader may be sure they would be careful how they emerged upon the next one.

They would not do so as unguardedly as they had before, the reader may depend.

At length, however, the end of the lanes was reached.

But they halted some distance from the turnpike-road, and listened.

The dull thump—thump of the dragoons' horses became more audible now that they had ceased to be in motion.

It was clear, then, that they had by no means given up the pursuit.

Every moment, then, was of importance, and our friends listened eagerly.

But no sound came from the direction whence they wished to take.

Cautiously, then, they advanced a few paces, until they emerged from the lane, just far enough to be able to glance up and down the broad high road into which the lane led.

Not a soul was in sight.

Taking heart at this, the two highwaymen left the shelter of the lane altogether.

They resolved, however, not to remain on the highway a moment longer than they could help.

At a swift gallop they tore down the road.

Quickly they glanced from side to side in search of a turning.

But the uniform line of the hedgerows remained unbroken.

Suddenly before them they saw two small twinkling lights.

They seemed to spring into existence all at once.

They were approaching.

The highwaymen came to the conclusion in a moment that they proceeded from some vehicle.

"Halt!" cried Claude Duval. "Pull up, Jack—pull up! Whatever this may be that is approaching, we will pull up and allow it to pass."

CHAPTER CCCCXIX.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL ROB THE FARMER ON THE HIGHWAY.

SIXTEEN-STRING Jack obeyed his comrade's injunctions with remarkable promptitude.

He was, indeed, in the act of reining in his steed when Claude spoke, and so he was able to quickly bring him to a stand-still.

He, too, had become convinced of the policy of drawing on one side, and allowing the vehicle to pass.

By this means they hoped to elude the observation of those within it, who otherwise, seeing them pass, would give information to the dragoons in the rear.

As soon as they had stopped their horses, our two friends backed them as close under the hedge as they could, in order to leave the roadway clear.

Scarcely, however, had they taken up their position, than Claude Duval addressed his companion in a low tone of voice.

"Jack," he said. "Jack."

"What, Claude?"

"That vehicle which is approaching?"

"Well?"

"Shall we let it pass us?"

"To stop it would be very dangerous."

"A fig for danger. I never yet stood on the highway, and allowed travellers to pass toll free, and I can't do it."

"But the dragoons?"

"Never mind them. I am in hopes they are a long way behind us. But come, we must make up our minds quickly. In another moment it will be too late."

This was true.

Whatever vehicle it might be, it was coming along at a rather swift rate, and in something less than the time Claude had named, it would pass them.

"I think we had better not meddle with it, Claude."

"Pho! pho! How much money have you got?"

"I don't know."

"You can guess."

"It is very little."

"I thought so; but let you have ever so little, you will still have more than me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for I have not a fraction."

"I have only a few shillings."

"Well, then, Jack, that proves we must have money, and that at once. You can't tell what emergency may arise, and, ten to one, if we have a better chance of filling our pockets than we have got now."

"I see you are bent upon it."

"I am, Jack, and for more reasons than one. Come, you need not fear the dragoons, I am certain; and we might just as well stop whatever is coming as let it pass. We shan't increase our danger either way. Now, Jack! Quick! prepare!"

Sixteen-String Jack somewhat unwillingly took a pistol from his pocket and cocked it.

"I don't half like this business, Claude," he said; "it is too mad-brained by far. I expect every moment to hear the trampling hoofs of the dragoons' horses."

"Pho! pho! we have not heard them, Jack, since we emerged from the lane. Are you all ready?"

"Yes, I am ready."

"Then we shall have this business over in less than no time; and, can't you see, if we only get fairly off before the dragoons arrive, the cart and the man who has been robbed will detain them a moment or so."

"Yes, but it will hinder us."

"Now, Jack, there is no time for another word. We must have money, for I intend to put up at the first convenient inn we come to."

Sixteen-String Jack said no more, for really there was not time.

The vehicle which was approaching was on two wheels. They could tell that by the sound.

They could also tell that it was drawn by one horse and



[MAUD PASSES THE NIGHT ALONE IN THE DESERTED MANSION.]

In another moment it was nearly opposite to them, and the two highwaymen, riding out with great suddenness from the place where they had been in ambush, cried—

"Halt! halt! Pull up your horse, or you are a dead man. A dead man in a moment if you disobey. Halt!"

As these words were spoken, the two highwaymen placed themselves one on each side of the vehicle, which they could now see was a cart of rather clumsy manufacture.

An ejaculation of fear fell upon their hearing.

Claude and Jack presented their pistols full at the head of the man who sat in the cart, and who had given utterance to the cry of terror.

He was the sole occupant of the vehicle.

Whether he checked the horse, or whether the creature understood the words which our friends had uttered, would be hard to say.

At any rate, the horse stopped and looked half-terrified.

The man who sat in the cart, and who was the sole occupant of it, dropped the reins as soon as he had given utterance to the ejaculation, and assumed an attitude of the most ludicrous fright.

"Spare my life—spare my life!" he cried. "Take all I have, but spare my life!"

"Your life is in no danger," said Claude Duval; "provided you at once, and without hesitation, hand over to me whatever valuables you may have about you. Quick! your money or your life!"

The man uttered a groan by way of reply to what the highwayman said.

"I am only a poor farmer, gentlemen," he said. "Nothing more, I can assure you."

"A poor farmer! Ha! ha! That's a good joke," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Why, there never was such a thing known. Come, be quick. Hand over."

The farmer uttered another groan.

It was clear he valued his life, and did not feel disposed

to throw it away merely for the sake of whatever money he might have about him.

Slowly he put one hand into his pocket.

"Be quick," cried Claude Duval. "Be quick. We cannot waste a moment. If you do not give us your money quickly, we will leave you out of the cart and take it from you; and you may depend we shan't be over gentle when we set about it."

The firm, resolute tone of voice in which Claude Duval spoke was quite enough to convince the farmer that he was in earnest, and that he fully meant what he said.

The farmer fumbled in his pocket, and presently produced a small leather bag.

Claude took it.

"This is too light," he said; "by far too light. This will not do, Mr. Farmer."

"It is all I have, good sir."

"Pho! pho! I know better. Now, look you. 'tis perfect folly for you to think of getting off and taking any of your money with you. We are determined to have it. Which will you do? Give it us, or will you compel us to take it? You will find the first the most comfortable to yourself."

The farmer uttered another groan—this time of a far more dismal character than before.

"Oh! gentlemen," he said. "Be satisfied with what you have got. If you take all, I shall be a ruined man."

"We can't help that," said Sixteen-String Jack. "Quick. Dub up. We cannot stand parleying here."

The farmer, finding all his entreaties in vain, now put the best face on the matter that he could, and from another pocket in his coat he produced another leather bag, which was not only larger, but very much heavier than the first one.

Claude took it from him in an instant.

"There, you villains," said the farmer, "you have got all now."

"I don't know that," said Claude, "and"—

"Hark! hark!" cried Sixteen-String Jack, suddenly. "Hark! I hear our foes upon the road again. We must be off without delay. Forward, Claude, for your life."

Duval listened, and in a moment became convinced of the truth of what his comrade had said.

The dragoons were on the road, and not far off, for the hoof-beats sounded with alarming clearness.

Claude did not hesitate.

Thrusting the bag which he had last received into his pocket, he turned his horse's head round at the same moment as his old comrade.

Then, touching their horses with the spur, they started off at a speed that filled the farmer with amazement.

While going at such a rate conversation was not an easy matter. Nevertheless, Sixteen-String Jack managed to say—

"Keep on, Claude, at full speed, until we come to the next turning. You may depend the dragoons will stop when they get to the cart, so we shall have some slight advantage there."

Claude did not reply.

He thought it needless, but he let Jack know he fully understood him by doing as he had advised.

They had not very far to go before they came to a narrow lane that led off at right angles from the high road in the direction they wished to take.

They turned down it without hesitation.

They paused a moment, however, and listened.

They could no longer hear the sound of the horses' hoofs beating upon the road, and they rightly surmised that they had stopped when they came to the farmer's cart.

This was sufficient.

With fresh hope and confidence they gave their horses the rein freely, and darted down the lane.

It was narrow and winding, like most country lanes are.

Suddenly, however, Claude pulled up, and, somewhat in surprise, Jack followed his example.

"What has happened?" he said. "What has happened?"

"Nothing serious, only we have just passed a spot where another lane turns out of this one."

"We have—we have."

"Let us turn back and go down it, then. I cannot hear anything of our foes. Probably they will take the turning out of the high road, as they have done before, and I

think we shall stand a better chance of throwing them off the scent."

"I quite agree with you. Come!"

The highwaymen turned their horses round and retraced their steps until they came to the narrow lane of which Claude had spoken.

It was much narrower than the one from which it branched off.

They galloped along it without hesitation.

All at once, however, they were compelled to come to a full stop, and our friends looked in each others' faces with dismay.

The lane was not a thoroughfare.

It was simply a private road leading from the lane to a farmhouse which they could just discern in the distance.

There was no outlet to it.

They had the choice of either entering the grounds belonging to the farm or turning back again.

Both courses seemed equally fraught with danger.

"I should have thought of this," said Claude, taking all the blame of what had occurred to himself. "I ought to have thought of this. Instead of bettering our position, as I hoped, I have only worsened it."

"Never mind," said Sixteen-String Jack; "we must make the best of it we can. It has turned out an unfortunate circumstance, but the idea of turning down this lane in order to throw our enemies off the track was so good a one, that I am sure anyone would have adopted it as we have done."

"No doubt, no doubt. But still, we might have known that, in nine cases out of ten, these lanes which branch off thus lead only to some farm or homestead as this does."

"But what is to be done?"

"There you puzzle me. Can you hear anything of our foes?"

Both listened with great intentness, but the silence which reigned about that spot remained unbroken.

"I can hear nothing, Claude."

"Nor I."

"I have a thought. Do you remember our intention was to seek some place of shelter as soon as we could?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose we make our way to the farmhouse yonder and ask for refuge."

"It would be dangerous."

"Why so?"

"The suspicions of the people would be excited."

"Not if we were careful, I think."

"And at this hour the inmates will be all retired to bed."

"Do you think so? Have you any idea what the hour is?"

"No."

"Well, look yonder over those trees. Do you see that faint gray streak of light? That shows the dawn to be close at hand."

"It does, it does. I had no idea it was so late."

"So early, you mean."

"Well, just as you like."

"Farming people are in the habit of rising very early at this time in the year. You may depend they are up before the dawn."

"But what excuse could you make for intruding on them?"

"That we must think of. Doubtless we shall be able to invent some plausible tale which will prevent them from having any suspicions."

"If we do not, it will be fatal to us."

"It will not do for us to turn back, will it?"

"It would be equally dangerous as going forward."

"Then forward be it, then. The dragoons may lose the scent altogether, and then if we can only remain at yon farmhouse until night, we shall be able to push on towards Finchley at an easy pace."

"It would certainly be as safe to remain at that farmhouse as at an inn."

"Perhaps safer."

"Do not, then, let us waste any more time in talking about what we shall do. Look how light it is getting, and I should not relish being hunted by daylight."

"But how are you going to excuse yourself to these people?"

"I must think."

"I don't know how it is to be done."

"I do. I have a fresh thought—quite a fresh thought."

CHAPTER CCCCXX

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL HAVE TO GET A PRECIPITATE RETREAT FROM THE FARMHOUSE.

As he spoke these words, Sixteen-String Jack, very much to the surprise of his comrade, Claude Duval, slipped off his horse, and, lying down on the ground in the lane, rolled over and over several times.

The natural result of this operation was that he speedily became completely beplastered with mud, for the lane was covered with this substance.

Having accomplished this much, Jack got up.

He then presented a very ludicrous appearance.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Claude Duval, in a tone of voice which showed how much he was bewildered by this action. "What in the world have you done that for?"

Sixteen-String Jack seemed to enjoy his amazement, for he laughed as he said—

"It is in order to get shelter at the farmhouse without exciting suspicion."

"But how can rolling yourself on the ground and getting yourself all over mud in that style contribute towards it?"

"I will tell you, Claude; but first, as I am down, I will unfasten this girth, and as soon as you are through, I will fasten it again."

"A wise precaution," said Claude. "But shall you be able to open the gate, think you?"

"Oh! no doubt I shall."

Sixteen-String Jack fell for the fastening of the gate as he spoke.

As he had quite expected, it consisted merely of a piece of chain, which was twisted and secured in such a manner as would have puzzled a stranger to undo.

But Jack was in possession of the secret, and, with as little trouble, probably, as the farmer himself would have had, he opened the gate.

Claude passed through at once, leading his comrade's horse by the bridle.

Sixteen-String Jack then fastened the gate again, and remounted his steed.

A kind of continuation of the lane led towards the farmhouse, and along this they proceeded at a walking pace.

"Come," said Claude Duval; "tell me your intentions. You have roused my curiosity to the highest pitch."

"It is very simple," said Sixteen-String Jack, "but I think the scheme will be all the more successful for that."

"Let me hear it, then."

"When we ride up to the door of the farmhouse you must give out that I have been thrown from my horse."

"Thrown from your horse?"

"Yes. Being covered with mud from head to foot, as I am, will make it appear as though such an accident had taken place. I will also act as though I had been slightly hurt."

"Capital," cried Claude Duval, enthusiastically. "That is a capital plan. They are sure to find you shelter, and they will have no room for suspicion."

"I hope not. We can say the accident happened a little way from here, and that we made our way to the farmhouse because it was the nearest habitation."

"Just so. Jack, you deserve great credit for hitting upon such a capital device, and if those dragoons will only be kind enough to go another way, we shall be able to have a comfortable day's rest."

"Come on, then. I can't say anything about the dragoons. In that respect we must trust to our luck."

"Entirely."

"Hush! hush! Say no more. We are too close now to the house to speak with safety."

Upon this, both were silent.

The little path—for road it could scarcely be called—led right up to the farmhouse, passing through the old wood on the way.

As soon as the highwaymen entered this last-named place, the door of the farmhouse was opened, and several persons appeared upon the threshold.

Upon the countenances of all the utmost astonishment was depicted.

Claude hastened forward, leaving Sixteen-String Jack to follow at a more gentle pace.

Pairing his hat, and making a most graceful bow, Claude addressed himself to the persons who stood at the

door, but particularly to a very short, stout man, with a fiery visage.

"This man, he rightly enough conjectured, was farmer, and the others members of his family."

"Excuse me, sir," said Claude, "for trespassing upon your grounds in the manner I have done, but I trust, when you hear the cause which has led me to do so, you will not be displeased."

The landlord nodded his head violently, but said nothing, though Claude fancied he got a trifle redder in the face.

At this moment Sixteen-String Jack arrived.

He halted by the side of his companion.

As may be easily supposed, the plight he was in attracted the immediate attention of those who beheld it.

Their countenances assumed an expression of curiosity.

"You see my friend here," said Claude Duval. "He is the occasion of our presence here. You see the condition he is in. It is the result of an accident. His horse shied suddenly, and threw him. Fortunately he is not dangerously hurt, but still he is much bruised and shaken. This being the nearest habitation, we made our way towards it, not doubting that you would allow us shelter for a little while, until he recovers sufficiently to resume his journey."

"Certainly—certainly," said the farmer, in a cheerful voice. "You shall, of course. You did quite right to come. Here, Jack, Tom, Bill, help the gentleman from his horse."

Three young men, apparently sons of the farmer, sprang forward as he spoke, and began to assist Sixteen-String Jack, who made believe to be very much hurt and very helpless indeed.

Claude hastily alighted, and came to their assistance.

Between them, Jack was fairly lifted out of the saddle and carried into the farmhouse.

With every imaginable care he was placed upon a large settle, which stood at one side of the fire-place.

He groaned slightly.

It will be recollected that, when the dragoons fired their volley at the highwaymen, one of the bullets had grazed Jack's cheek, and just nipped a piece out of his ear.

From this blood had flowed, thought not in very great quantities.

Nevertheless, mingling with the mud, it gave him the appearance of being badly hurt.

The farmer, who, like most of his class, was a hospitable man, was most assiduous in his attentions.

He imagined that the travellers must be persons of distinction, or they would not travel on horseback.

Before Claude was aware of it, the horses were led into the stable.

He did not wish to appear over anxious about them, lest it should give rise to suspicion, yet he felt he would have much preferred to have seen where they were disposed.

An opportunity for visiting the stables would, no doubt, very shortly occur, and so he controlled his impatience.

It would have seemed strange to have neglected his friend, who seemed so seriously injured, in order to look after the horses, which he was over and over again assured were in perfect safety.

He was compelled to rest content.

The family had not long risen, and when they had been startled by the sudden appearance of our friends, they were sitting down to breakfast.

Sixteen-String Jack acted his part to admiration.

None but a doctor could have told that he was uninjured.

The simple-minded inmates of the farmhouse, however, never for one moment dreamed of calling into question the truth of the tale they had been told, and the muddy state of Jack's vestments was to them super-abundant proof.

They washed the mud from his hands, and bathed his face.

Then the wound he had received was disclosed.

Fortunately this happened to be just such a one as would be produced by a fall from a horse, should the rider chance to fall upon a sharp stone.

This wound was carefully bathed and strapped up by the farmer's wife, while the daughters were busily occupied in cleansing the mud from his apparel.

By the time their attentions were over, Sixteen-String Jack thought fit to show himself a little better, for he was

afraid, in their solicitude for his welfare, that they would send off for a medical man, and he by no means wished to run that risk.

Accordingly, he made an effort as though to rise.

He was immediately assisted, and upon gaining a sitting posture, he declared he was wonderfully better.

A great improvement in his personal appearance was perceptible, and he spoke in a louder and firmer tone of voice than he had previously done.

At this the whole of the inmates of the farmhouse expressed themselves much delighted, and they pressed Claude and Jack to join them in the breakfast, which had been interrupted by their arrival.

The highwaymen did not hesitate to accept this invitation.

Their food for a long time past had been somewhat of the roughest, and they eyed the substantial viands which were placed upon the table with feelings of considerable satisfaction.

In less than a quarter of an hour, then, they had made themselves quite at home, and it was evident the honest farmer and his family were much delighted with their company, which was quite an event in their monotonous existence.

Sixteen-String Jack said, with a smile, that he had been by far more frightened than hurt, and made a capital breakfast.

Nevertheless, although they seemed to all outward appearance to be so thoroughly contented and happy, our friends in reality were not so.

They were a great deal too near the dragoons to be either safe or pleasant, and every now and then, when there happened to be a lull in the cheerful conversation, they listened attentively for any sound that might indicate the approach of their enemies.

But all was still; and as minute after minute passed away they gradually began to believe that they would be left unmolested.

That belief was fallacious, and they were destined to be made aware of it in a very abrupt manner.

During the breakfast Claude thought continually of the horses.

When he alighted and followed Jack into the farmhouse, they had been led off he knew not whither, though he was particularly assured by the farmer that they were all right.

Of this he had little or no doubt.

What he wanted to know was just where they were placed, so as to be able to make his way to them direct, in case any emergency should arise.

He was fidgety and anxious, and made up his mind that, as soon as ever breakfast was over, he would make some excuse to go out and find them.

But at a farm the breakfast is the principal meal, and occupied what seemed to him an intolerable time; but that was caused by his anxiety.

Besides, breakfast had hardly been begun when they arrived.

Still all continued silent, and he breathed more freely.

Whether the dragoons had lost the scent or not was a question they could not answer.

As we have said, not even an acute observer would have for a moment fancied that they were otherwise than light-hearted as they seemed, for not a trace of anxiety was perceptible.

Suddenly, however, Claude started.

Jack started at the self-same moment, as though by sympathy.

Their countenances changed slightly.

Ere they could move or speak, however, there was a hubbub of voices, and the trampling and prancing of horses' feet.

"Tracked," exclaimed Claude Duval, springing to his feet, "and done, I am afraid."

Sixteen-String Jack also sprang to his feet.

But the inmates of the farmhouse took little or no notice either of their movements or words.

The whole of their attention was directed to something that was going on outside the farmhouse, for they had one and all flocked to the door the moment the sounds we have described assailed their ears.

The two highwaymen gave one glance through the window.

That was enough.

Coming rapidly towards the house were the dragoons.

There was fifteen or twenty of them at least.

As Claude had said, they had been tracked.

Truly was the position of our friends most desperate.

"Fly!" exclaimed Sixteen-String Jack, with startling energy. "Fly! it is our only chance."

"Where? where?"

"To the back of the house. Here, this way."

"Our horses?"

"Give up all thoughts of them. I know not where they are. We must escape without them."

"Impossible. We might as well surrender at once."

While speaking these rapid words the reader must not suppose the highwaymen were idle.

They had previously noted a door that appeared to lead to the back of the house.

They darted towards it just as the dragoons reined up at the front door.

They heard them address some question to the farmer.

But what it was they knew not.

In another moment they were through the door.

There were a couple of bolts upon it, and these they shot into their sockets instantly.

They were then in a kind of kitchen which looked into the yard at the rear of the farmhouse.

A door led into the farmyard, and through this they dashed with the utmost precipitation.

"Quick!" cried Jack. "On, Claude, on. Yonder are some buildings; the stables, doubtless. On, I say; we may reach them yet in time. If we can only mount our steeds, all will be well."

Claude saw the buildings to which his comrade alluded and made all speed in that direction.

CHAPTER CCCCXXI.

THE DRAGOONS MAKE A RUSH INTO THE STABLE, AND REACH THE LOFT OVERHEAD ABOUT A MINUTE TOO LATE.

It is wonderful how much can be done under the impulse of some powerful incentive.

Had not our friends been fully conscious that their lives and liberties solely depended upon their exertions, they could not possibly have done what they did.

The time which it took them to reach the door of the stable was infinitesimal.

They thought the buildings must be stables when they first glanced at them, but as they drew nearer they became convinced of it.

The door was standing wide open, and they could see into the interior, which set all doubts at rest.

Just as they reached the door, however, a loud shout fell upon their ears.

They turned round with the rapidity of lightning.

The sight they saw was one that was quite sufficient to extinguish in their breasts the least lingering hope that they would be able to effect their escape on this occasion from their persevering foes.

Coming towards the stables at full speed was the whole of the troop of dragoons.

They learned in a moment from the farmer that two men had arrived a little while before on horseback, and their flight was discovered the moment after.

What were the highwaymen to do now?

There was no longer the faintest possibility of concealing themselves from their foes.

Where, too, where they to go?

It was a natural instinct that caused them, the moment after making this discovery, to turn round and dash with frantic speed into the stable.

It put off their danger for a moment, but nothing more.

To be sure, they alarmed the door shut, and fastened it ere the dragoons could arrive, but then how were they to get out of the stable without being captured?

It was quite certain, too, that they could not stand a siege.

A dozen vigorous blows upon the frail door would demolish it.

Both were so breathless with the speed they had made, and by the imminence of the danger with which they were threatened, that they could scarcely command their voices sufficiently to speak to each other.

It would be folly to attempt to saddle their horses."

Before they could get half-way through that operation, even supposing every necessary article was at hand, the dragoons would have the door down, for the first thing they did was to strike some violent blows with the butt-ends of their carbines, which were admirably adapted to such a purpose.

What were they to do?

"The loft!" cried Claude Duval. "The loft! Let us gain that. We may then find some means of leaving this place."

"No use—no use!" gasped Jack. "We had better give in at once."

"Never while I have life!" said Claude Duval, with resolution.

"The door will be down in an instant!"

"This way—this way!" cried Claude. "It is our only chance, and, if we do no more, we shall protract our capture to the last moment, and even that is desirable. Quick! After me! This way!"

Claude hastened across the stable as he spoke, and Sixteen-String Jack followed closely after him.

The inside of the stable was tolerably light, and Claude's quick eye had detected one of those perpendicular ladders fixed up against the wall, by which the loft overhead is generally reached.

Never were those steps so quickly ascended before.

Just, however, as they gained a footing in the loft, there was a terrific crash.

The door had given way, and the dragoons, hastily dismounting, came pouring into the stable, under the conviction that they had only to make one vigorous rush, and then capture their prey.

They had never given the loft a thought, and at first they looked about them in some surprise, unable to account for the disappearance of the highwaymen.

A slight movement, however, attracted their attention to one portion of the stable.

Having reached the floor of the loft, the idea had occurred to Sixteen-String Jack to try whether the ladder was moveable.

To his joy he found it was.

He had now the means of interrupting, to some extent, the progress of the dragoons.

They would not be able to follow them either so easily and quickly as they otherwise would.

It was the movement of this ladder which attracted the attention of the dragoons.

They sprang forward quickly, hoping to be able to seize the ladder and drag it down again, but they were too late.

Sixteen-String Jack flung the ladder down on the floor of the loft, and turned to observe the proceedings of his comrade.

Claude was busily engaged in making a hole in the thatched roof.

"Help me," he cried. "We will get through here as soon as the hole is large enough."

"But what are we to do then?"

"Drop down and run for it. We shall be on the outside of the farmyard, and the dragoons will either have to come our way, or else surmount the high wall which encloses the farmyard."

While speaking, both worked with a good will at the thatch.

It was the easiest matter in the world to make a breach in it, and they were out on the roof of the stable before any of the dragoons could reach the loft.

"Look, Jack!" cried Claude, "here are the open fields, and yonder is a plantation, or wood, or something of that kind. We can drop down, and then we will run for it."

The reader must understand that the stable had a roof, one portion of which inclined towards the farmyard and the other towards the fields at the back.

It was in the last described piece of roof that the highwaymen had made a breach.

Consequently they were out of sight of those dragoons who remained on the watch in the yard.

Claude's suggestion was evidently the best that could be made, and it was immediately acted upon.

Slipping down to the edge of the roof, they held by their hands a moment and then dropped.

The distance was by no means great, and they alighted upon some fine soft turf, so that they felt scarcely a shock.

Directly they reached their feet they started off as fast as they could run across the fields, making direct for the plantation which Claude had spoken of.

It was not more than a quarter of a mile distant.

A cry from their foes let them know that they were seen.

By the exercise of very great gymnastic skill, a dragoon succeeded in getting up into the loft, and the moment he did so he let the ladder down, which enabled his companions to follow him with all expedition.

They ran, of course, first of all to the breach in the roof, and there they saw the highwaymen running with great swiftness across the meadow.

The cry which reached the ears of Claude and Jack was uttered by the dragoons upon the impulse of the moment upon finding that their prey had got so cleverly out of their reach.

It was a cry compounded of anger, rage, and fear.

Some scrambled through the hole in the roof and rolled down recklessly on to the ground.

The others, giving the alarm to their companions, turned round and descended into the stable again.

With great expedition they remounted their steeds, and then, to their dismay, they found they would have to go round some distance to gain the meadow at the back of the stable, for the wall which we have spoken of as enclosing the farm buildings was several feet too high for them to leap.

It was no good grumbling, however, and the less time they lost, the better, for every moment was of infinite value to the highwaymen.

With the utmost speed they got round in a straggling kind of troop into the meadow at the back of the stable, but by the time they arrived here, they found the highwaymen were just plunging into the plantation.

Towards this they galloped at a tremendous rate, for they were determined not to give up the chase until forced to do so.

Our friends had got a tolerable start, however, and both felt themselves to a certain extent safe when they gained the cover of the wood, which was of great extent.

Here the dragoons would have to follow them on foot, for the trees grew too closely together for the horses to make their way between them, so that they would be upon more equal terms with their foes.

Moreover, they had a chance of getting out of sight of their pursuers, and hiding themselves somewhere.

The reader will, however, concede that the dragoons were remarkably expeditious in their movements.

They had descended from the loft, mounted their horses, rode round till they came to the gate leading out of the yard, and reached the meadow, while Claude and Jack, going at their utmost speed, had only been able to run about a quarter of a mile.

Those dragoons who had so precipitately and inconsiderately got through the hole in the roof quickly gave up their idea of chasing the highwaymen on foot.

The weight of their accoutrements, and being so encumbered with weapons, prevented them from taking two steps, while the highwaymen took three; and those who had ridden round reached the confines of the plantation before them.

The soldiers could not forbear from uttering an oath of vexation when they found the highwaymen had fairly taken shelter beneath the trees.

They knew well enough how much it would diminish their chances of effecting their capture.

Nevertheless their blood was up, and they were too much interested in the hunt to give it up, so they alighted from their horses again, and plunged into the wood.

Nothing, however, of Claude and Jack could they see; nor could they, by listening attentively, hear the least sound of their footsteps.

The case began to look hopeless.

So many ways spread out before them, only one of which could be the right, and how were they to distinguish it from all the rest?

Leaving the dragoons to get out of their difficulties in the best way they may, we will return to Claude and Jack, who were by no means out of danger yet, although they had materially bettered their position.

They had run as they had never run before, from the stable to the wood, which appeared to them a haven of safety.

The only thing was, should they be able to reach it time enough?

They scarcely dared to think about this.

So far they had succeeded much better than they could have hoped for.

Sixteen-String Jack was amazed, for he had felt inclined to give up at first, so hopeless did it seem to think of escape.

But by the courage and promptitude with which Claude had acted, they were now much better off.

Their heads spun round and round, however, with the violent exertion they had been compelled to make.

Perspiration streamed from every pore, and they gasped painfully for breath.

Their hearts throbbed, and the veins and arteries in their bodies swelled and threatened to burst.

But, in spite of this exhaustion, they kept on at a speed that was absolutely astounding.

As soon, however, as they got beneath the shelter of the trees, they gave a sigh of deep relief.

Success, however, only prompted them to fresh exertion.

Now was the time to render available the advantage they had been lucky enough to gain.

A glance behind them, before plunging into the wood, showed them the dragoons in the distance, galloping with tremendous speed towards them.

This convinced them that they had, indeed, no time to lose.

Choosing their path at random, for they felt that to them all would be alike, they kept on steadily in one direction.

It was important that they should do this.

In a wood it is easy enough to run round in a circle without being conscious of it.

So they kept steadily on.

The wood was of vast extent, as we have previously remarked.

Strictly speaking, however, it was not a wood, but rather a plantation or preserve.

It was the property of the lord of the manor, and it was one extremity of it which abutted upon the grounds in the occupation of the farmer, who rented all from the lord of the manor before mentioned.

As the highwaymen proceeded, they found the trees grew closer and closer to each other, while its appearance of wildness increased.

Suddenly, however, as they ran staggeringly on, Claude, who was first, caught his foot against the root of a tree, which projected slightly above the ground.

He fell down as though shot, for in his exhausted state it did not need much to take him off his legs.

Jack, who was close behind, saw the accident, but not in time to stop or turn aside, so he fell headlong over his companion.

Thus they lay, breathless, and utterly exhausted, unable to move either hand or foot.

CHAPTER CCCXXII.

SIXTEEN-STRING JACK AND CLAUDE DUVAL DISCOVER A CAPITAL HIDING-PLACE IN THE WOOD.

CONSCIOUSNESS, however, did not abandon them, although they reached the ground with so much violence.

Although they were deprived of speech and breath, yet they were sensible of what had happened, and knew that the dragoons would quickly be upon them.

This was a terrible thought to have.

Unless they could recover themselves sufficiently to rise and seek some hiding-place, they would have all their trouble for nothing.

Indeed, what they had done with so much toil would only disadvantage them, for now they were not in such a good position to resist their foes as they were at first.

If the dragoons came up now they would make them prisoners without any trouble.

They would be bound unresistingly.

Terrible were the efforts which the worn-out highwaymen made to regain their feet.

All, however, were in vain.

They could do nothing but gasp for breath.

They were not able even to exert their own impotency.

It seemed to them, in the excited and anxious state of mind in which they were, that they laid their helpless on the turf for a long, long time.

But this was a delusion.

In reality, hardly two minutes elapsed.

At the end of that time, they, with many struggles, rose to their feet.

They listened, but they could hear no sounds which indicated a dangerous proximity to their foes.

When they stood up they felt much better, and every second that now elapsed witnessed an improvement.

"All is well so far, Jack," said Claude Dural. "I have hopes, after all, that we shall be able to make our escape. In the first place we must find a hiding-place of some sort or other. Come, follow me."

"Do not go fast, Claude; there is no occasion for us to increase our distress by making great speed. Keep on gently. We are now, I take it, in the very heart of the wood."

"It seems so, for the trees grow close enough together."

"They do, and this undergrowth would almost serve us as a hiding-place."

"We will endeavour first to find a better, my friend."

While speaking thus, the highwaymen, at a walking pace, penetrated still deeper and deeper into the wood.

At every step the growth of vegetation became denser and denser.

This was a pleasant discovery for them to make, because they were aware of how much it would diminish the chances of their foes being able to perceive them.

Whether the dragoons had started off on some wrong track they knew not.

It seemed strange that they could hear nothing of them.

But our friends were too wary to be lulled into a sense of false security by this silence.

On the contrary, they were the more suspicious and apprehensive, for they believed that it portended some deep-laid scheme on the part of their foes.

The highwaymen, however, had left no visible track behind them.

The dragoons were not well enough skilled in woodcraft to be able to trace them by their footprints on the grass, or by the twigs which they had broke and displaced in their progress.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if they wandered off in a wrong direction.

Claude and Jack, as they got more and more involved in the intricacies of the wood, looked keenly about them on all sides in search of a hiding-place, but nothing of the kind could they discover.

There was the brake, and the gorse, and furze bushes, beneath which they could have easily concealed themselves, but there was too much danger of discovery, for the dragoons would probably make a close search, and beat the underwood in all directions.

At length Claude paused.

"Jack," he said, "there is no good going on like this; we shall travel till we come to the other side of the wood, and then a nice fix we shall be in."

"What do you propose, Claude? Where is there that we can hide ourselves?"

"That is the question. It seems to me that the best thing we can do is to climb up a tree."

Sixteen-String Jack shook his head.

"I am afraid that will not prove a very good or very safe hiding-place."

"Why not? The wood is full of trees, and how are the dragoons to tell in which particular one we take up our quarters? Clearly they have no idea of our immediate whereabouts, and it would be an endless task to search the trees one by one."

"Very true, Claude, it would. I begin to think now that a tree would answer our purpose best."

"It would, you may depend."

"I should have no doubts upon the matter if it were night, but you must not forget it is broad day."

"I know it is, and that is a circumstance in our disfavour. Still, a tree served us once excellently, and I think one will again."

"I hope so. But you must remember that, when we hid ourselves in one before, it was at night."

"So it was. But come, since we have decided upon what we are to do, let us look out for a tree that seems best adapted for our purpose."

"We shall not have much trouble in doing that, for we have plenty to select from. Look, yonder seems to be a

regular thicket of branches. They grow so thickly together, that you can't see the sky between them."

"That will be the place, then, my friend." Come on. Hark! I am afraid we have dallied too long."

Both listened, and very faintly they could hear the murmuring of voices and the crackling of bushes, as persons forced their way through them.

"We must make haste if we are to hide ourselves."

"Yes, come on. Here we are."

"Our friends were very fast recovering from the effects of their tremendous exertions."

They were able to speak to each other freely and easily, and beyond all doubt they would be able to perform the feat of climbing up the tree.

Claude and Jack paused before one, the trunk of which was of extraordinary dimensions.

They selected it because it grew very closely to four or five others, and the branches of the whole overhead united, and formed an impervious mass of branches.

Besides which they were evergreens, and their long dark leaves seemed to afford them every facility for hiding themselves.

From the fact of the trunks of the trees growing so close to each other, the highwaymen were able to climb up with tolerable ease.

The one with the large trunk had many rough inequalities in its bark.

These they grasped, and not without some difficulty, managed to scramble up.

As soon as they could reach to take hold of the branches their progress became easier, and, in less time than it takes to write it, they reached the top of the tree.

Here, however, a surprise awaited them, and it was fortunate for their personal safety that they made the discovery at the moment they did.

The tree with the large trunk was really a natural phenomenon.

Upon reaching a certain height, our friends found that very few branches actually came from it, but its upper portion was completely buried by the leaves and branches of the other trees that grew in such immediate proximity to it.

This trunk was hollow.

The whole of the inner part of the tree had completely decayed away.

Still the circle round it was of no inconsiderable thickness, and it was from this circle that the boughs of this singular tree received their nourishment.

"What do you think of that, Claude?" said Sixteen-String Jack, as he pointed to the hollow in the trunk which we have described.

"It is the most singular place I ever saw."

"What do you think of it for a hiding-place?"

"A hiding-place?"

"Yes."

"Why, I confess I should much like the idea of dropping down into it. In the first place there would be the difficulty of getting up again, and then there is the danger that it is the lair of some wild beast or other, for the place seems excellently well adapted to that purpose."

"There's a good deal of sense in what you say; but with regard to the first objection, I don't think we should have much trouble in getting up again if we lower ourselves down."

"Well, perhaps not; but how if some other creature has taken up its quarters here?"

"We can soon ascertain that."

"How?"

"Drop something down. A pistol will do."

Claude took an unloaded pistol from his pocket and dropped it down the hollow of the tree.

They heard it strike against the bottom, but no other sound followed.

From this they came to the conclusion that it was empty.

It was just at this moment they were startled by some sounds, which showed very unequivocally that the dragons were close at hand.

"Quick, Claude!" said Sixteen-String Jack. "Make up your mind at once, or it will be too late. In another moment the dragons will be upon us."

"What do you advise?"

"I should say drop down at all risks. I consider the chances are all against the dragons finding us in such an

unlikely hiding-place. We have left no clue by which they can follow us to this place; and while we are hidden in the trunk of this tree, we shall escape a danger to which we should most certainly have been exposed if we had concealed ourselves among the branches."

"What is that?"

"Why, you may depend that the dragons, if they heard the least stir among the branches of a tree, or if they fancied they could distinguish any dark object among them, they would not scruple to point their carbines at it and fire."

"True."

"To be sure, we might not be hit; and yet again we might one of us receive an ugly wound."

"That decides me. Let us go down into the trunk."

"Hush! Quietly! Make no more noise than you can possibly help. The dragons are almost within sight. Do not speak again."

This good advice was taken.

Rapidly and yet noiselessly, Claude lowered himself down into the trunk of the tree.

He held by his two hands at his full length, and then, the least stir among the branches of a tree, or if they fancied they could distinguish any dark object among them, they would not scruple to point their carbines at it and fire."

He reached the bottom in safety, and gave his comrade a whispered assurance to that effect; who, however, immediately cautioned him to be silent as he valued his life.

Sixteen-String Jack now lowered himself into the tree, and, in less than a moment, was standing in safety by the side of his companion.

Owing to the enormous girth of the tree, the inside portion, that was hollow, was large enough to have contained at least four persons to stand within it, though they would have had some trouble to move.

But the two highwaymen had plenty of room to move about.

They kept perfectly still, however, for fear that any movement they might make should reach the ears of their enemies, who were now very close at hand indeed.

The highwaymen would have given anything could they but have seen what was going on outside, but it was perfectly useless to think of such a thing as this, so they were forced to content themselves with stretching their sense of hearing to the utmost extent.

What they heard was far indeed from being encouraging.

On the contrary, it was calculated to produce an opposite effect.

No sooner had they placed their ears against the tree to listen, than they heard a confused babel of voices, and the trampling of many footsteps.

Then the next sound almost shot through them like a bullet, so suddenly did it come upon them.

That word was "Halt!"

From the manner in which it was spoken our friends could tell that a soldier had pronounced it.

Why should the dragons halt there, so close to the spot where they were hidden?

Could it be possible that they had been heard or seen?

Their hearts almost ceased to beat as they fancied this, perhaps, was the case; for the place in which they were, though good as a hiding-place, yet was bad in case the dragons should learn they were there.

The suspense which they endured can therefore be imagined.

The command was instantly obeyed.

The trampling of feet and the murmuring of voices abruptly ceased.

"This is as near the centre of the wood as can be," said a voice, which sounded so close to our friends that they could scarcely forbear a start.

"Very well, then," said another voice, "we will commence at once."

"Shall I order the bugle to be blown?"

"Yes."

The word was given, and then, very much to the surprise of our friends, three clear notes upon a bugle were given.

The pretty musical sounds awakened a thousand echoes in the leafy recesses of the wood.

Scarcely, however, had those echoes died away than the bugle-call was responded to by several others, which seemed to come from a great distance.

Then another bugle-note was blown close to the tree.

This was repeated at brief intervals.

In their uncomfortable position in the tree, our friends heard all this, and wondered what in the world it meant.

CHAPTER CCCCXXIII.

THE OFFICER OF DRAGOONS TAKES SOME VERY EFFICIENT MEASURES TO PREVENT THE ESCAPE OF THE HIGHWAYMEN FROM THE PLANTATION.

In order to account for these inexplicable movements on the part of the dragoons, we must go back to the time when they arrived at the wood just five minutes too late.

The officer in command saw that it would be ridiculous to run through the wood at random after the highwaymen, and so he hastened to summon his men about him.

Then the plan which he adopted and the orders which he issued, were military in the extreme.

He had seen with his own eyes our friends enter the wood, and he resolved to besiege them there, and take such precautions as would effectually prevent them leaving it without his knowledge.

Accordingly he commanded the greater portion of his troop to mount, and to post themselves round the wood in such a manner as to be in sight of each other.

Then he (the commanding officer), with a few of his men, would make his way to as near the centre of the wood as he could get.

As soon as he arrived here, one should blow three loud blasts upon a bugle to announce the fact.

These sounds the others were to reply to, and then enter the wood, taking care to leave no bush unexamined in their progress.

All were to make their way towards the centre where he was standing; and, in order that they should have no difficulty in knowing where the centre was, the bugleman should blow a note upon his instrument at frequent intervals, which sound would form a capital guide to them.

This, then, was the explanation of the strange sound which the highwaymen had heard, and, as the reader will readily believe, they puzzled their brains in vain to account for it.

It was not likely that they would be able to arrive by speculation merely at the real state of affairs.

The commanding officer and the few men who were with him, all unconsciously followed almost in the very steps of the highwaymen.

They kept a sharp look-out on their way, but they were not keen-sighted enough to see anything that was calculated to excite their suspicions.

At length they reached the very tree in which the highwaymen had concealed themselves; and, judging themselves, to be in the centre of the wood, the blasts had been blown upon the bugle in the manner we have related.

The answering notes were given, and the dragoons, who had formed a circle round the wood, set themselves in motion, each one directing his steps towards the centre of the wood.

On their way they beat all the bushes with their carbines, and peered narrowly among the naked branches of the trees, but, of course, without being able to see anything, though several random and useless shots were fired.

At first the dragoons, who formed a circle round the wood, were at some considerable distance from each other, but, as they drew nearer to the centre, the circle became diminished in circumference, and they got yet closer to each other, until they were able to touch, and, finally, they were compelled to form a circle two deep.

It was a good idea to endeavour to drive the highwaymen into the centre of the wood, for they could not have broken through the ring; and had they not sought shelter as they did, or had they concealed themselves among the bushes, as they at first thought of doing, they would inevitably have been discovered.

As it was, the soldiers had all their trouble for nothing, and their officer's very clever scheme produced no results.

Ere long the centre was reached.

The men advanced to their officer in an unbroken circle, but they drove no highwaymen before them.

Upon seeing this, the officer in command uttered a curse of vexation, for he made sure that this excellent scheme would answer the purpose he had in view.

But it did not.

"What is to be done now?" asked the one second in command.

"It is quite certain they are in the wood?"

"Quite, sir."

"They have hidden themselves, then?"

"I am afraid that is it."

"What are we to do then?"

"Well, the men have tramped through pretty well every square foot of the plantation without finding them, and one might just as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay as try to find them!"

"I am afraid so. But look you, I will not give up this adventure until I have captured or slain them. I am determined not to have all this trouble for nothing. My blood is up, and let them beware!"

"What do you propose, sir?"

"Let me think a moment, and you, Locksley, try if you can suggest something that you think likely to answer our purpose."

As the speakers were within a yard of the hollow tree in which the highwaymen stood, of course they overheard every word; and, with an impatience which perhaps may be conceived, they waited to hear what was further said.

A silence of some few minutes' duration ensued, and then the officer said—

"Have you thought of anything, Locksley?"

"Yes, I have thought of one scheme, sir."

"What is it? Let me hear it at once."

"I propose, then, that the men should be stationed round the wood at a short distance from each other, and ordered to keep close watch, and to give an immediate alarm if anything of an unusual character took place."

"That is just what I had thought of, Locksley," said the chief officer.

Locksley bowed.

It was generally in this manner that his superior availed himself of his suggestions.

"Then you think that is the best thing that can be done, sir?" said Locksley.

"I do."

"So do I. These villains are hidden somewhere in the wood, and no doubt, while it is daylight, will keep close enough; but as soon as night comes they will try to steal off."

"Then, Locksley, I will place such a guard round this plantation that not even a hare could leave it without my knowledge."

"You cannot do better, sir."

The officer now called his men together, and marched them off to the outskirts of the plantation, where he saw to their being posted himself.

He also took the trouble to particularly impress their duty upon them one by one.

He had not so many men under his control as he could have wished for this service.

He would have preferred to have had them much closer to each other.

This was impossible, and he was obliged to do the best he could.

The men would have to be a little extra vigilant, that was all; and he took care to impress upon them that it would answer their purpose to be so, since there would be all the fewer to divide the reward among.

The men promised to be more attentive, and with this assurance the officer had to remain content.

Let us now return to Claude Duval and Sixteen-String Jack in their perilous and uncomfortable position in the tree.

They heard the conversation between Locksley and the officer with a feeling akin to dismay.

They did not venture to speak or move, however, until some time after all the dragoons had left the spot, and then, in a low and anxious tone of voice, Sixteen-String Jack addressed his companion.

"Claude—Claude!" he said. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes—yes."

"Speak low, for fear we should be overheard. What do you think now?"

"I think we have escaped one great danger."

"Yes, unquestionably we have; but then we are threatened with one of equal magnitude."

"I fear so."

"I am certain. If we wait here till night, I am afraid shall be discovered if we attempt to leave."



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